

HOSTAGES

A Play in Two Acts

PART FOUR OF THE OAKLAND CYCLE

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Persons

BO – a gang leader in Los Angeles. Currently leader of the Crips.

SLATER – his brother, leader of the rival gang, the Bloods.

QUEENA, also **LADY Q** – BO's girlfriend, but formerly Slater's.

JANELLE and **MARKITA** -- prostitutes, friends of QUEENA.

LESTER (also called **LES**, and **DO-LESS**) -- BO's advisor at first, and then **SLATER'S**.

COOTY -- an old friend of **SLATER**, his lieutenant.

"DJ" and **"MAC9"** -- younger inexperienced gangers. The hostages.

1st GANGER

2nd GANGER

3rd GANGER

THE GRIOT

THE CHORUS

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

CHORUS

There were two gangs in Los Angeles

GRIOT

One called the Bloods, and one called the Crips

CHORUS

There were two gangs in Los Angeles

GRIOT

And the situation was terminal
In the city of Los Angeles--

Two gangs
Led by two brothers

CHOR

Brothers, and yet enemies

GRIOT

What good can come

When brother fights with brother?

CHOR [distributed]

What good can come? --

The hot sun burning down

What good can come,

In the dark time of the world?

GRIOT

Now the first of them, the leader of the Bloods,
He was the worst of bad news
A bad, a devastating dude

CHORUS

On the other side

GRIOT

His counterpart, his brother in the Crips
A major player on the street --
The worst of young criminals, very promising for

CHORUS

the prison yard the graveyard the electric chair

GRIOT

These two got into it,
Got in each other's face
In a major major way--
But they were brothers

What does that mean, brothers?
Who can say?
The same woman was their mother
The same man had been their father
Growing up together in south central Los Angeles

CHOR

Under the desert sun
In the dark time of the world—

Where there is nothing!

GRIOT

This
Is what happened

[CHORUS disperses.]

SCENE 2**GRIOT**

One day the brother who was the leader of the Bloods, he went down to the river. He shouted to some Crips on the other side. He said --

SLATER

Send me my brother, tell him I want to see him.

CRIPS [variously]

Who you think you be talking to my man

Yeah who you supposed to be

Get it straight, this nigger be dreaming

Talk that trash all out your mouth

Step over here my man I fuck you up

SLATER

Send me my brother.

GRIOT

His voice was loud and echoed in the concrete walls

In the Los Angeles sun

His voice was almost drowned

By the river of the traffic

But his voice was not drowned. They heard him.

SLATER

I want to see him standing right where you're standing. Need to do some business, just me and just him.

GRIOT

So these dudes they're like –

CRIPS [variously]

I'm a put a cap in this nigger's ass

I'm a take him down one two three

**You mess with me, you going one a two places, hospital or morgue, ain't no other choice,
which it be depend on my mood.**

SLATER

**Tell him I want to see him standing there, in neutral territory, tomorrow night, and
he should come alone.**

CRIPS [variously]

No way my man, you dreaming that stuff up

Talking that trash all out your mouth

Just like it going to be some kind of bad ass thing that's going on, and you that thing

SLATER

Tomorrow night or there'll be trouble. Of course, if he's afraid to show up, that's a whole other story, isn't it.

CRIPS [variously]

You aint never gonna be the man

No way

[suddenly]

Yo, man --- don't you recognize?

That's Slater!

No.

Yeah, that's him.

Hey Slate!

Yo Slate, when they let you out?

[Enter BO; the others retire]

BO

What's going on now? Oh now I see, how long have you been out?

SLATER

I been out, so here I am.

BO

I can see that.

SLATER

Not a lot else you're seeing.

BO

Maybe and maybe not.

SLATER

Things looking kind of slack. You don't get on top of things, they get on top of you.

BO

I see you develop a lot of deep insight up there in the joint, pacing around that yard . I should have known you'd show up.

SLATER

There's lot a things you should know. We've got to talk some business. Major changes coming down .

BO

What exactly are you talking, Slate? All this is fine -- you're going to be a big man, take me down a peg.... But what exactly are you talking here?

SLATER

What it is, is a duel.

BO

A duel.

SLATER

You heard me.

BO

I heard you, but I don't believe you said it. What kind of movies did they have you watching up there?

SLATER

That's just like you, can't be serious, got to make a joke, show how smart you are. But this is the time to be real, time to be a man. The two of us fight, choose wherever, our two organizations be the witnesses, each on its own side.

BO

Must have been a lot of Biblical epics. You're going to blow your horn, have the walls come tumbling down.

SLATER

You see this? [A knife.] Come on!

BO

See that? [Gives signal.]

[MAC9 and DJ, two snipers belonging to BO, are revealed at different places in the theatre; they come onto the stage with guns pointed at SLATER.]

SLATER

We're supposed to be alone.

BO

Don't trust appearances. Slater, you're my brother, you force me into this. Look, here's some money.

SLATER

You think I need your money? I control that side of the river.

BO

You used to, you've got nothing now.

SLATER

I've still got people loyal to me. You're going to find out.

BO

That's fine. Look man, times are hard, you can admit it. We all go through hard times.

[BO tosses bills onto the ground, expecting SLATER to pick them up.]

[SLATER does nothing.]

Oh you don't want it? All right...whatever....

SLATER

You want to insult me, that's fine. But this is going to happen, maybe not now, but it will. We'll be seeing each other. Things are going on you don't know anything about. But you will.

[Exit SLATER. The money lies there.]

BO [to snipers]

Let him go.

[Enter LES, with recorder.]

LES

Who you think put him up to this?

BO

It's just his own stupid...

LES

Maybe, one thing I'd say though...

BO
What?

LES
You don't take it wrong what I'm gonna say, or I ain't gonna say it.

BO
Say it, What?

LES
It isn't good anybody hear about this. You know what I'm saying? They hear you back down –

BO
I didn't back down.

LES
I know, I know --

BO
Ain't nothing to back down from. Wants a duel. I couldn't believe it.

LES
Me neither. I got it all right here.

BO
Yeah you do.

LES
But still. Other people who weren't here, they don't know he's just some crazy muther go around talking trash all out his head like some dog in the street.

BO
What you telling me?

LES
That's what I'm telling you. Dog in the street's got to be put away.

BO
He's my brother.

LES
Man he wants to kill you. You think you throw him some cash he's going to get a bottle of wine, lie around on a blanket in the park? I don't think so. He'll be coming back.

BO

What do you suggest? He didn't take the money. Look at it. Five hundred dollars blowing around in a parking lot.

LES [points to gunmen]

I suggest that, and that.

BO

I can't do it.

LES

You have to.

BO

Must be another way.

LES

Other way is his way

BO

You think I should go through with it? A duel?

LES

Well...if you won, it'd look real good. They need to see you're strong. These Mexican gangs and these Vietnamese, they're eating us up. They're like you were five years ago. They want what you've got.

BO

They see us do this kind of thing, they'll think we're nuts.

LES

How do you think Slater kept such a strong grip on his people even while he's locked up three whole years? He comes out he's got them in his hand just like before. He had three of them taken out while he was in there, said they double crossed him. When was the last time you had someone taken out?

BO

That's not my style.

LES

That's what I'm saying, you can't lose touch with the street, otherwise they'll eat us up. Man lose touch with the darker side of things, there ain't no help for him.

BO

He still ain't got as much as I do. He didn't before, he doesn't now. Don't matter how many of his fool ass niggers he blows their brains out. What the hell good that do?

LES

Keeps them in line.

BO

It didn't though. Some of his people were helping those Vietnamese and those Mexicans. Maybe they still are, maybe some of our own are doing that. He and I, we've got the same problem. We'll work it out. He's just in a bad mood. Keep our spies looking out for where he goes.

[to snipers]

Go and tell the others to keep an eye out. Make sure no foreign groups come into our places of business. Duels, champions – man what craziness. Some kind of dark ages thing. Ok look, we chill out a little. It'll be all right. Let's enjoy ourselves, check out some ladies here –
[WOMEN join them.]

This all blow over.... Hey baby, you looking pretty fine today.... [to LES] Come on, man.

[Exit all.]

SCENE 3

GRIOT

When the cat's away the mice will play
When the man's not there
They crawl out from here and from there
And from everywhere

[Exit GRIOT.]

[Enter DJ and MAC-9, the two gunmen. They have a pint of whiskey between them and pass it back and forth.]

DJ

That Lester talking all kinds of trash to him, you hear that?

MAC-9

Yeah, he's like a snake right in the grass.

DJ

And we don't even have no grass. Look at this place, we spend our life in a place like this. All dirt, concrete...

MAC-9

Trash blowing around.....

DJ

That Lester, I ain't never trusted him from day one.

MAC-9

Yeah, I don't know man, maybe he got a point though. You know? Maybe that be a good way to end all this stuff we're going through here. Got to unify. One way or another, got to happen.

DJ

Yeah ok, might's well. So fine. Have the damn duel, show them who's boss. It was him -- Bo -- got us into all this, with his moves he putting on Slater's woman the way he did. That's how we get all this bad blood now: Slater's men fighting Bo's men, them fighting back. What kind of thing is that?

MAC-9

That Slater nuts off his head half the time, going around talking trash, never can tell what he's going to do one minute to the next. It was just as well take that turf away from him.

DJ

That's the other thing, man lose that much territory and his woman too, both at the same time, he bound to be mad. And he in the joint and can't do nothing about it? He just got to sit there and take it?

MAC-9

Yeah, just makes him that much more crazy.

DJ

Don't know which one of them is worse. Bo Slater, Slater Bo -- bad either way--

MAC-9

And now what we doing here? We sitting here, shooting our mouth off. Come up from Compton to make it big, making it small instead.

DJ

Bo knows we're his two best soldiers, what does he do for us? Nothing. We ain't making jack here. And on top of all that -- man, this gang war we got going, it ain't no joke. "T" got capped the other day, Little Mike got his knee half blown off.

MAC-9

Yeah, I seen him in the hospital. He could hardly talk. He's lying there, bandage on his leg. It all soaked through with blood. He looked half dead. Tubes in his arms. Then he starts going crazy on me, thrashing all around. Took three men to hold him down. He still there. They fitting him with an artificial leg.

DJ

He used to play a lot of ball.

MAC-9

Damn right he did. And he only twenty.

DJ

"T" only 18. That's the street for you. Live quick, die young. Do what you gotta do.

MAC-9

Meanwhile we scratching in the dirt.

DJ

Yeah. He's too much of a ladies man -- Bo. You know, That's the problem right there. Our leader -- Bo ladies' man. If he got something on his mind more than five minutes in a row --

M9

It's not no business. Speaking of the ladies, we look around here a little, what you say? 'Cause what we got to be strangers with them for? We always was friends with them back there.

DJ

You think that's good idea, all this stuff going on?

M9

What the hell -- we got to do like what this guy says? Like he knows what he's doing, and give us orders left and right? What the hell --

DJ

Better not let anybody know. They think we hanging with the enemy.

M9

That's cool. They won't know nothing.

DJ

Yeah all right.

[They finish their bottle --]

M9

Come on.

[--and exit.]

SCENE 4 [Slater's apartment. They are drinking and smoking.]

SLATER

You see how he tried to trick me? See the way those two guys pop out like that?

COOTY

Yeah, but I was right there. I had them in my sights – poom.

SLATER

That was good you didn't come out blasting though. I didn't want that right then.

COOTY

Yeah I know. But I had 'em. He thinks he's smart, he's not that smart.

SLATER

Old story there. A man got to know what he's doing, see where he's going. But he don't. They think I'm stupid. They all do.

COOTY

Naw.

SLATER

Oh yeah. And he always been like that. Always. Gonna find out, though. I been in the joint three years, you know what that is?

COOTY

Yeah I know, I been there. Means you lost everything, means you angry, means you going to kick some ass, you ready to do it, I can see that. I can understand that.

SLATER

Yeah it's not just that. I'm different now – it's like a piece of steel inside me. In that place – you know how it is -- you got to know how to stand up. I knew how to. You got no friends in prison.

COOTY

Little tiny cell, big empty space. And dangerous. I can see why you want to get him back. But what you gonna do? I could've shot him right through the head.

SLATER

That place – I'd lie there at night, my thoughts going here, there -- thinking all kinds of things, they just go *who*. Looking up into the dark, you know, I'm seeing something up there, keep looking at it -- you know what it is? It's myself I'm seeing, what I want to be when I get out. Then the morning comes and you got to get up and the guards are there, they got their guns and their dogs and to them it don't matter one damned bit what you're thinking at night. They break your head right open for you, shoot you dead right there. I saw that happen -- visitors come in the yard one day -- politician, big man of some kind. Some brother made some kind of funny move -- he wasn't even thinking of the guy. Man up in the tower shot him dead -- right through his head -- just like that. He's lying there like a dog, his brains half out. Every morning you come out in the daylight, and that's what's waiting for you. One guy had a knife he made from a toothbrush -- sharp as a needle -- I seen it. Guys have razors -- one had this whole thing he put on his hand like brass knuckles, but it was all razors sticking out. Only one way to go, you got to get hard as those walls holding you in, or you ain't going to come out. But if you do, then the people that put you in, they're going to be thinking twice.

COOTY

They saying his woman wants him to do it now.

SLATER

His woman ha? Yeah, that's a good one.

COOTY

She telling him, that's what I heard.

SLATER

Where you hear that from?

COOTY

That Lester. You know him?

SLATER

Oh yeah. Older dude like us. Been in the joint, come out like me.

COOTY

He said she wants Bo to do it. Fight you. Guess she ain't said nothing yet, but that's what she's thinking.

SLATER

How's he know?

COOTY

I don't know. He knows.

SLATER

You think she can convince him?

COOTY

He ain't some kind of fool. He'll laugh at the idea.

SLATER

Make him stop laughing. I think I know what might do it. Come on. We go out to see the sights a little, have a few drinks -- Come on. Now I'm feeling better. Yeah. Now you got me thinking.

[Exit both.]

SCENE 5 [BO'S Head Quarters.]

BO

All right. So we see the situation. Someone putting my brother up to this: he wants a duel, we're supposed to have a dual. Maybe be on horses? -- wear suits of armor.... What kind of crazy is this?

1ST GANGER

It must a been just his own garbage he's thinking up.

BO

I don't know, and this guy Lester--

1st GANGER

Lester the Jester.

BO

Oh yeah -- he wants me to do it!

1ST GANGER

That's the funny part right there.

BO

He come out the joint waving all these connections around. I thought he might be useful. Now I'm thinking twice. Put a tail on him.

1ST GANGER

All right.

BO

I want to get a message over to Slater. Tell him we can't be having this craziness. He thinks I don't know what's going on, but I do.

1ST GANGER

Been in prison three years, he must have had contacts inside.

BO

Yeah I got them outside. You can get over to see him because he trusts you. Tell him these Mexicans and these Vietnamese have been edging us out. Don't overstate the case. I don't want him to think I'm hurting or anything. Tell him we can make a deal – 30/70 now, and he can have more later if things work out, if he's reasonable, and handles things sensibly, not like before – shooting everybody all the time. Tell him if he's ready to be sensible, we can make a deal. Don't let anybody know about this.

[Enter 2nd GANGER.]

2ND GANGER

Hey Bo.

BO

Is she waiting to see me?

2ND GANGER

Oh yeah, she's out there.

[BO moves to an observing point from which QUEENA can be seen.]

BO

Well well.... But don't she look so beautiful? You've got to handle her just like a snake sometimes, but yet she is the most beautiful thing. I remember the first time I ever saw her – walking through just like a breeze blowing by. I couldn't believe my eyes. So you been having her followed, right?

1ST GANGER

Yeah.

BO

What's she been doing? Who's she doing it with?

1ST GANGER

Just the usual. She's turning high level tricks for that record company -- all these big time rappers. And she got her girls friends some gigs like that. They're partying -- they go here, they go there.

BO

That's fine. She must be meeting some very high level guys.

1ST GANGER

Just all these rappers think they're going to be gangsters. That's their fantasy .

BO

What's her fantasy is what I want to know.

[Enter 2ND GANGER again.]

2ND GANGER

She's getting mad waiting out there.

BO

Well bring her in.

[Enter QUEENA.]

QUEENA

Have you heard about Slater?

BO

What about him?

QUEENA

What does he want coming here?

BO

Where else is he going to go? He just got out of prison. So – here he is.

QUEENA

Does he still have people out there?

BO

Oh yeah. Not many, some. He wants it all back. I think probably. Yes, he wants it all back.

QUEENA

What are you going to do?

BO

I was just going to ask you that.

QUEENA

Don't be ridiculous.

BO

Maybe you miss him.

QUEENA

You're talking crazy.

BO

Maybe you miss big strong Slater, rough tough guy. Isn't that right?

QUEENA

That's just like you. As soon as I need something from you, you turn on me. With all your jealousy. Its fine when you want something from me, but then when I need something –

BO

What would that be, besides money?

QUEENA

I'm the one standing right by your side these past three years.

BO

While Slater was in prison.

QUEENA

That's right. And I was glad, in a way, when he went there. Because I was afraid of him. I don't want to talk about all of that. I didn't really want to see him go, but I had to get away from him. You don't know what I went through. He has such a temper, so irrational some times. And now he's out. I'm afraid. I can't help it – I don't like to admit it, but I am. Afraid of what he might do, afraid of what he's thinking.

BO

What's he thinking?

QUEENA

I don't know. That's why I came to you. Of course then when I do, all I get is you pushing me away.

BO

What do you want me to do?

QUEENA

He's making you look bad, with a direct challenge right in your face like that. People are talking. I've heard different people saying different things.

BO

Like what? What are they saying?

QUEENA

I don't want to get into that. I just wanted you to know. And I feel like he's following me. I don't know if he is, but I feel like he is.

BO

All right. Well I'll just have someone shoot him. I guess that's it. Don't have to have some kind of duel. That's ridiculous. How'd he ever think of that? He must have been watching too many movies. Otherwise how would he ever get such an idea?

QUEENA

I don't know. Maybe it's just part of his nature. Gangers used to fight hand to hand all the time, that's what I've heard. Then all the guns came and things changed, the type of men changed. It's funny that you're brothers, the two of you are so different.

BO

Tell me who was following you. What did they look like?

QUEENA

I don't want to talk about it

BO

Tell me what happened. Look, why don't you stay here with me tonight?

QUEENA

No, I have to leave. Jannelle and Markita have something that they need to talk to me about. I don't know what it is.

BO

All right. That's fine.

QUEENA

So are you going to do it or not?

BO

I'll have to think about it. I have to meet with some people now. But I'll call you later. All right?

QUEENA

Yes all right. I'll talk to you later.

[Exit BO.]

[Exit QUEENA.]

SCENE 6 [Same location. The 2 GANGERS come back, with a 3RD GANGER]

1ST GANGER
Guess she told him.

2ND GANGER
She leading him by the nose.

1ST GANGER
I think she grab a little lower down.

2ND GANGER
You think she trying to get that challenge thing going?

3RD GANGER
Well what's it look like to you? Man you are the dope ass of the year sometimes.

2ND GANGER
You always believe what you hear? You always believe what you see? That's your problem. On the street, nothing is what it is, everything's something else – first thing I learned. Been out here since seven years old. And I ain't heard nothing, ain't seen nothing, was what it seemed like.

1ST GANGER
Don't make 'em that way.

2ND GANGER
That's right. Especially her. You think she doing one thing, she doing another.

3rd GANGER
I don't know, I think she wants him to do it. Don't matter what she wants though. Bo only do what Bo wants, that's one thing.

1ST GANGER
Anyhow, we can't let our guard down here at all, at any time.

3RD GANGER
Yeah and now we got this hostage thing on top of everything else.

1ST GANGER

Hostage? What hostage thing?

3RD GANGER

Yeah these two knuckle heads, this DJ, and this Mac9 -- you know them?

1ST GANGER

Oh yeah, trouble, real trouble.

2ND GANGER

Wild ass yo yos. I don't know where they ever got those two, they totally nuts.

1ST GANGER

What about them?

3RD GANGER

They been captured, taken hostage.

1ST GANGER

Who captured?

3RD GANGER

Mexicans looks like

2ND GANGER

Why didn't they just shoot 'em?

3RD GANGER

That's what I say. They worthless anyhow.

1ST GANGER

Don't seem like a Mexican type of thing.

2ND GANGER

They been changing, getting more up themselves all the time, sticking it in our face -- jab jab jab -- all the time these days.

3RD GANGER

They was over that way, that side of the town, doing some kind of crazy stuff. Anyway, Mexicans come up on 'em -- 'Hands up! Get in the back.' They got in the back. They gone. No one knows where.

1ST GANGER

We tell Bo yet?

3RD GANGER

Not yet. I was just about to, then she was here ahead of me, and he goes out in a bad mood. I didn't want to make it worse.

2ND GANGER

He'll find out pretty soon.

1ST GANGER

Ok, look: tonight we got to have men at each entry. They got to be armed and dangerous, with good back up -- stay awake all night – no dope, no girls. Understand?

3RD

Right.

2ND

Right.

[Exit all.]

SCENE 7 [Apartment of JANELLE and MARKITA.]

JANELLE

What time we got to get there? What time Queenena say she want us?

MARKITA

I don't know, I took a nap, I just woke up. She always, 'do this, do that. Be here, be there.

Make sure you look nice.'

JANELLE

Yeah she trying to get herself up in the world. That's cool. I can understand that. Yeah I can understand that for sure.

MARKITA

I think she said eleven. We got to be there at eleven.

JANELLE

When we going to get any decent dope again around here? Pills are fine for high school girls....

MARKITA

Well at least we got something.

JANELLE

Hmmm Share and share alike. Got to get fixed up here, got to get -- Where's my stuff? You stealing my stuff again.

MARKITA

I ain't stealing your stuff. We don't need none of that. We can just smoke it.

JANELLE

You sure?

MARKITA

Oh yeah. Jimmy told me and Jimmy knows.

JANELLE

yeah we know that. You see him lately?

MARKITA

A little. Afraid to too much.

[They are smoking heroin.]

MARKITA

Shootings all over the place these days.

JANELLE

Oh yeah. Wild and crazy. It's the Wild West.

MARKITA

Oh Jimmy Jimmy Jimmy – he's just my little cute angel you know. And he's so skinny, but his arms are so mmmm, mmmm, mmm.

JANELLE

Guess you like him a lot.

MARKITA

Oh I love him. I can't help it. Don't tell nobody.

JANELLE

When I ever tell anybody your business? You can trust me.

MARKITA

He is so cute. Got these interesting sort of space alien eyes. I always tease him.

JANELLE

Where's that lighter? Come on, I supply the dope, you got to at least supply the lighter. I'm a light your fire, lady. Does he light your fire?

MARKITA

Oh yeah, he does. He's just so sweet, and he's got this slim and sort wiry and sort of graceful body. He's so strong too, he's so slim but he's so strong.

JANELLE

But is he long? That's what I want to know.

MARKITA

You got a one track mind and it have the same horse running on it all the time. He almost made me feel like I don't know what. You remember you first time? Well, I don't know, maybe not that.

JANELLE

My first time was with my uncle, can I say? Damn I'm so tired all the time. We got to be at that hang out place for those rap music jerks.

MARKITA

Yeah, I don't know about this. But hey, they got the money and so we're their honey.

JANELLE

Yeah I don't like them, I don't care what she says. They're a bunch of jerks, plain and simple. They're all in a fantasy. They think they're big gangers, people got to be afraid of them. They're big and tough boom boom – they're a bunch of singing and dancing faggots is what it really is.

MARKITA

Oh yeah.

JANELLE

And she just right in there with them, she swallow the whole thing hook line and sinker. Queena does, you know. She think she's gonna be right up there, her name in lights or something.

MARKITA

She swallow a whole bunch of hooks and sinkers, just like us. But hey, she's taking care of us. She don't just forget about us. She ain't forgotten her old friends at all, unlike most. Got to give her credit for something.

JANELLE

That's true. She changed, she's different than what she used to be. Come out of rehab that one time, she changed her tune, don't get high no more.

MARKITA

Wish I could be like that. Wouldn't want to be like her though, really.

JANELLE

No, rather get high and at least have some friends.

MARKITA

Clock ticking on her, she knows that.

JANELLE

Don't want to be like us, end up almost thirty years old with nothing.

MARKITA

Clock ticking on everybody, alarm rung on us a while back.

JANELLE

Maybe but we still here. Do you think you should keep seeing him? I'm not saying you shouldn't, I'm just saying. Could be dangerous.

MARKITA

I know. I can't help it though. I love him. He's the only guy ever treated me just so sweet, all the time, all the time. If I don't have him... I don't know....

JANELLE

Well you still got me.

MARKITA

Yeah I know that's cool. You using up all the dope, look out the way.

JANELLE

You always say that. I never use as much as you.

MARKITA

Look out the way.

JANELLE

You need to slack off a little too, you know.

MARKITA

Can't slack off. I slack off I die. Jaynee, Jaynee.... what we doing here? All we do is trick, smoke, go to sleep, get up, trick some more, smoke more dope. Gotta end somewhere.

JANELLE

No. See – no. That's not true. I aint gonna die, you aint gonna either. We gonna live, we gonna live to be eighty-five, the both of us, have a big house way up in the hills, have all kinds of cute and really hung dudes come around our place all the time, party and

everything.

MARKITA

At eighty five I don't think so.

JANELLE

I'm telling you the way it's going to be. Yes.

MARKITA

I don't want no hung dude at eighty five. Gimme that.

JANELLE

Mind your manners. And I'm telling you how it's going to be. Don't want no negative thinking. Where that going to get us? What you think of this, how this look? I ain't eaten in about two days. I get high so much, I ain't hungry. How this look? You see the kind of clothes she wearing lately? – 'my Gucci this, my Gucci that.' I got a Gucci for her.

MARKITA

Where she get all the money for all that?

JANELLE

Must get it somewhere. Well we better go get ours. What time is it now?

MARKITA

About that time.

JANELLE

Let's go.

MARKITA

Wait up, wait up.

JANELLE

Come on.

[Exit both.]

SCENE 8 [A street outside a nightclub.]

LES

Where are those girls at? We got to be over there pretty soon. Do they know how to get here?

QUEENA

Yes they know how, don't worry. You going to introduce me to your friends, right? Me, not them. It has nothing to do with them, so don't worry about them. They'll be here. They better be.

LES

All right now, look -- I'm handing over this part of our operations to you, for the time being. I got too much on my mind these days. You run your girls, you keep these guys happy. But...anything having to do with something that's not a girl, you back off, you send them to me. It's a girl type of thing, they go to you. Anything else, they come to me.

QUEENA

That's fine. I don't want to be bothered with all of that anyway.

LES

Things might be looking up here. We got some strange things going on, but this connection with these music people, this could be something good for us.

QUEENA

I think we're singing from the same page, that's fine. I'm just wondering what's happening here. I don't think Bo really knows what he's doing anymore, just between you and me.

LES

Maybe, maybe not. What about that girl you got, that Markita? She got some kind of connection with that Vietnamese guy. What we doing about that?

QUEENA

I got it under control. They're under my command, don't worry. They do what I say. I'm worried about other stuff, and now this Slater coming back around.... Can you set up a meeting with him for me? I need to talk to him. He won't let me get anywhere near him. You know him, pretty well, I know you do.

LES

What you need to talk to Slater for? Bo's in charge here, not Slater.

QUEENA

Slater got let out. He's running around out there, just like these two crazy muthers that supposedly got kidnapped or something. -- Did they really?—

LES

What you need Slater for? You got enough to pay attention to running your girls up to those singing and dancing fools. You don't get involved in all this other.

QUEENA

I need to talk to him.

LES

Why not you just go do that?

QUEENA

You know him, come on.

LES

Everybody knows him, you know him too. What you need to talk to him for? You didn't talk to him enough when you was with him? Maybe you didn't spend that much time talking.

QUEENA

Say whatever you want, Lester, a clever man like you got to tell off his mind all the time. That's cool. Who's paying you these days anyway? Somebody always is, isn't that right?

LES

Nobody ever paid me a day in my life, ok? I do what needs to get done, whatever that is, and I know how to, ok?

QUEENA

Well good. Then go set up a date between me and Slater, someplace out of the way, someplace where we can just talk. That's all I need.

LES

You still didn't tell me what for.

QUEENA

I don't need to tell you my business. Since when I got to tell you this and that? I want to tell Slate that we don't need this kind of challenge match thing here. That's not the way, we got to head this off. I've seen brothers killed all the time, I don't need to see any more of this.

LES

I know why you're afraid of Slater. You helped put him in prison.

QUEENA

Who told you that?

LES

Rumors.

QUEENA

That's all a bunch of lies. He was set up by his own people, along with the police. His organization was all like a rock you turn over, all the things crawling there – that's how many informers. He never wanted to see it. I told him, others told him. He never listened. You got to help me out here, Les. I admit there's personal reasons I got to see him. And please don't tell Bo. Please. Ok? You know how he gets, and there is no reason for that. I

have no interest in getting back with Slater, the idea is ridiculous. But I need to talk to him. It's important for everybody that we not have crazy ideas, crazy insane ideas floating around and people -- you men, with your minds all bent out of shape with them.... Just go and ask him. I'll meet him anywhere he says. I'll be by myself, no bodyguards. Make sure he understands.

LES

All right, but what are you going to do for me?

QUEENA

Anything you want.

LES

I don't need that.

QUEENA

I have information, you know I always do. My girls tell me everything, I tell them nothing. You would not believe what they can find out. And they need me. They have habits, weaknesses. It's not good to have weaknesses. I used to. I got rid of them. And now I know, I see, I hear -- I know. Unlike so many others. Get me a meeting with Slater. We both need to be sure what he's thinking. He must be crazy. We can't have crazy running around loose and not know what it's thinking.

LES

All right. Meanwhile, we better get over there to meet these people. Don't want to mess this up. Night life, night death. Isn't that right? Night life, or night death. Which it going to be depend on what you do. Everyone have a road in front of them. They got to go on it. Some run, some walk, some crawl along. Some try to hitch a ride. You do what you can. It start to rain out. What you going to do about that? You do what you can. Some crawl in a rabbit hole, they stay there, that's there thing. Others climb up a tree. Want to be up high. Better watch out, though -- tree hit by lightning. You burn up, and die. Then after a while, you come down to the cross roads. Robert Johnson went down to the crossroad, he try to hitch ride. Some say, it was the devil come up on him. Made him a deal. He sign his name in blood. Then he would be able to play anything on that guitar -- his music go out into the world, his voice be heard everywhere, his fingers do like magic on those strings. There's lot of strings, though, the world have a lot-- the night have its own. Night life, night death. But not if you know how to play it. I set up a meeting, and you play it right. And that girl you got, she got to break off from that Jimmy Nyguen she been fooling with. You didn't think that I knew his name, but I do.

QUEENA

I'll take care of it.

LES

Good. Come on. Let's go. The stars are waiting.

[Both exit.]

SCENE 9 [SLATER'S place. They're hanging out. Drinking.]

SLATER

So you went to see her? That how she get a hold of you?

COOTY

No, she calls me up.

SLATER

How she get your number ?

COOTY

I don't know, got it somehow.

SLATER

I think she's afraid. That's good. Tell her yes. Tell her to come on and see me. We need unification not all this fighting each other. But he can't do it. Need to increase my own manpower here. So many men been killed.

COOTY

There's another thing. Bo wants a meeting: special deal -- wouldn't tell me what. Mexicans still getting in our face, trying to run us out of our territory, it ain't just the cops. Sent his man Lester over.

SLATER

Lester the Jester. ... I don't like being looked at the way I am. I don't deserve this. I didn't want to kill...different people. I wish I didn't have to. But they still have to learn. They think they can tell me whatever and I'm going to believe it. 'Hey Slater, guess what, grass is blue, sky is green. I saw it myself.' Oh, ok. 'Hey Slate, guess what, a dog goes meow meow, cat goes ruff ruff. Hey Slate, guess what, I'm your good buddy. You been knowing me from way back.' Oh yeah? 'Hey Slater, oh Slate, you are just so big and strong, I just can't resist.' But I can look at the sky. It's blue, it's not green. Grass is green, and money is too. I've heard lots of dogs around here. I know what they say. Problem is, someone's going to be a criminal, going to walk on that side – ok. But you can't be a fool on top of that. I know where I'm walking, and I know where I'm going. Know how to get there.

COOTY

All right, I got to tell you there are these strange rumors, have to do with the Mexicans.

SLATER

What?

COOTY

Not sure yet. Seems like they abducted a couple of Bloods.

SLATER

When? Where? How abduct, since when they abduct?

COOTY

Don't know that either.

SLATER

That's funny. Not sure I believe it. Things are very strange these days, strange weather too, been feeling it in my blood. Sometimes having dreams, thought I was done with all that.

COOTY

You got a lot of stress -- not surprising, it's rough out there -- like a war, gang life nothing but a war, war all the time, every way you look, always wondering 'who, what, where' -- hard on the mind: you start thinking things, seeing things. Your mind's in a narrow place, a narrow tunnel, you got to come out of that. Look around here -- you're way high up, yeah, but it's still like we're in a bunker, man, you live in a bunker.

SLATER

Need to.

COOTY

Maybe so, but you can't have your mind in that bunker too -- four walls and a narrow slit to look out. You're in prison all over again.

SLATER

What you recommend? I'm supposed to just walk around out there, let them shoot me right now? Oh, they'd love that.

COOTY

No, I don't know. But it ain't no good, you know.

SLATER

I'm fine. What's going on here, I know what it is. Why this happen? All the Black men gone downhill, let themselves go totally crazy. Blowing each other's brains out right on the street. Because of all this infighting -- just like two dogs, you chomp my ass while I chomp your ear -- the Vietnamese and the Mexicans step right up to that. They been able to strangle hold our shipments, just like a tourniquet around our neck. Raise up the prices. Get themselves more money. Then they buy up all the cops that they need. Real cheap five and dime type cops. Then they swarming us with them. And Bo he don't do nothing. He just hanging around, ladies' man type of guy, party type of guy, his head either inside a beer bottle, or maybe champagne bottle in his case, or between some hooker's legs. Yeah that would have been just his type of thing. So that's it -- we're dealing here with poor management. But I know what I'm going to do.

COOTY

What?

SLATER

Tell you later. For now, go tell that Queena to come on. Let's take a drive. I take your advice, I need to get out a little more. No, wait. You go. You go out. I'm staying here tonight.

COOTY

You sure?

SLATER

Yeah. Think things through.

[Goes to the window, looking out.]

Look at all the lights down there. Look at them all.... I'll talk to you later. Say hello to all the hookers for me. Just like I don't see enough of them around here.

[Exit SLATER.]

COOTY

Right.

[Exit COOTY.]

SCENE 10 [BO'S Head Quarters]

[BO and 1st GANGER are talking. 2nd GANGER and 3rd GANGER are outside. It is evident that BO has just had a meeting with someone.]

3rd GANGER

What's wrong? What happened now? Who was that just left?

2ND GANGER

Mexican high up person. One of their major guys. Come on.

[They enter.]

BO

I don't believe him. He's talking trash, he doesn't have them. I'm not going to listen to some Mexican tell me what to do.

1ST GANGER

Where you think they are?

BO

Who knows? For all I care they can stay there. They've been so much trouble, god damn! Whoever let those two into this organization? And now I hear they did something to some old woman... what was it, some Mexican woman? Is that what this is? They're paying us back for that?

1ST GANGER

I don't know what it is.

2ND GANGER

No, it was a Black woman. Some kind of old lady wander around.

3RD GANGER

Old crazy woman.

BO

How come we have an old homeless, Black woman, African-American woman. One of our own women, with some kind of problem -- how come she's like that and no one looks after her? Do you know what I'm saying?

1ST GANGER

We don't know who she is.

2ND GANGER

No one knows -- say she on drugs or something.

3RD GANGER

Those two hookers Queena runs with, they found her near their building. Took her in.

BO

Queena did this?

3RD GANGER

No, not her, them. I'm not sure she know about it.

BO

What kind of place is this? What kind of people are we? How are we supposed to fix things, make our community better? Now my own brother -- doing these things he's doing lately, threatens my ambassador that I sent, stuck a gun in his face, ran him out the door. How are we supposed to fix things here, we acting like this with each other?

1ST GANGER

What you going to do about this?

BO

I want my two men back, they're good people, they're crazy but they're all right. I don't want anything to happen to them, they're two of my best soldiers.

1ST GANGER

There's all sort of strange rumors about those two, and they're a pair of screw up if you ask me.

2nd GANGER

They don't know how to be gangers. They think all it is is just going wild. They don't know how to follow a plan, take orders, do things right.

3RD GANGER

They just do whatever, I don't think they're worth it.

BO

No, I like them. I used to be like that. My brother Slater was the cautious one back then. I'm going to get them out.

LES

People see they do this kind a thing, they don't like it. Maybe make you look bad. Let me tell you, I've seen this before. You got to distance yourself from them, you've got to put some distance there.

BO

I'll get them back. Keep them in a low drawer for a while.

LES

Two million dollars though.

BO

I can afford it. But I'm not doing it right now. I don't need to meet with any damned Mexicans. Right now just tell them to give them back. No further meetings.

1ST GANGER

They say they want to negotiate.

BO

I don't care. They should not have done this to begin with. I'm not paying money for my own men, or maybe I will later -- we can talk about that later. I don't want to be too hard on them. I thought we were going to be in business. All right, fine.... But if I do pay, we'll make it be part of some larger deal. Tell them to hand them over. If they don't, they're going to have trouble.

G1

Yeah I'll tell them.

[The 3 GANGERS exit.]

SCENE 11

[JANELLE and MARKITA, their apartment.]

JANELLE

Oh morning morning, terrible terrible terrible....When am I ever going to feel -- not even good just normal again? You know?

MARKITA

I think it can't be done. Well that was quite a party, got to say that much. You know I'm not going to do what she says.

JANELLE

What you think she do when she knows?

MARKITA

I don't care.

JANELLE

She might make trouble for us though. I don't like these guys either, but it beats walking around on the street getting beat up every third week. Then she's got these dope connections, which these days seems like we really need. I guess....

MARKITA

I got that taken care of, I told you.

JANELLE

Well what if Jimmy breaks off with you? Then she's on our case, other people don't trust us anymore, just because you used to know him.

MARKITA

That isn't going to happen. You sound just like her.

JANELLE

I'm just saying. And what if she does something to us like send some guys over and who knows what. I heard maybe she might have something to do with this kidnapping thing.

MARKITA

Yeah what the hell is all that about?

JANELLE

I don't know, nobody knows. They think it didn't really happen, they flying around somewhere doing who knows what. And now we got this old lady staying here.

MARKITA

She'll tell us to get rid of her. You think she's that old?

JANELLE

I don't know. She got a habit her ownself, I see that.

MARKITA

I give her some of those pills. That hold her a while.

JANELLE

What she doing now?

MARKITA

She in there sleeping. I check on her later. Fed her a couple of those sandwiches we had. She chomped them right down – voom, gone. Drank down two bottles of water and some juice I had.

JANELLE

She must a been wandering around a while.

MARKITA

Yeah I don't know where she come from, she don't want to talk.

JANELLE

Something happened to her.

MARKITA

Yeah I don't know.

JANELLE

It's strange. They usually just shoot them.

MARKITA

Why would Queena want to do that? She knows them too, we all did back there. They were kind of crazy, but they're just a couple bloods like anybody else.

JANELLE

Well like I say, most of those guys don't think they really did. They just off someplace. They crazy everybody knows.

MARKITA

Some people say she hanging with the Mexicans, they seen her prancing around over there.

JANELLE

I don't believe that. She's bad but she's not that bad.

MARKITA

I'm still not going to do what she says, I don't care. I can't even love who I want, I got to do what they say all the time, I don't think so.

JANELLE

Now she's trying to make up with Slater. All of a sudden he comes back -- that's what it is right there, he pop out of prison like a jack-in-the-box. Since when that happen? Usually they gone for twenty years. And so now she's afraid, so then she think she gonna boss us around, puff herself up and make it look like she's oh so loyal, so you can't even know Jimmy Nyguen. I don't think it's the Vietnamese make problems for them anyway.

MARKITA

You think she help to send Slater up?

JANELLE

I think she got caught up in stuff she didn't know what it was. She only 19 when all that happened. I think she just said something without thinking, and then they could tell where he was and they went and got him. But they knew already, you know. They didn't need her. Who the hell was she? They don't pay attention to some girl. Just like with us -- some young girl, some old girl...they don't care. We like a paper towel to them. They wipe their hands, that's it.

MARKITA

I don't think so. You know --? Jimmy loves me, I know. I love him too. You too, what about that Jamal you had?

JANELLE

Don't remind me. He's dead now, dead and gone. Remember when he got shot. They told me he was in the hospital. I went there. He's lying there. It wasn't like a person asleep, passed out. He just lay there like a sack, like no bones in his body anymore, just empty, dead, like a sack of sand. He was still breathing. They had all these tubes in his mouth, all taped up. But he was gone, I knew -- half his chest was ripped open. They had this big thing around him, but blood all soaked through. I remember his shoes over near a chair and pieces of his clothes -- they cut them off him. I thought how beautiful he was -- muscles so perfect everywhere, and there he was just lying there. And then he died, two days later. I always think of him. Well anyway, what we doing here? We sitting around talking about the good old days.

MARKITA

I'm going over to see him. I'll bring back some stuff for both of us. We still got those pills from last night?

JANELLE

Yeah we're good for a couple days, even if we give her some, still ok. What I'm supposed to say, Queena comes around and you're not here?

MARKITA

She don't own me. I do what I want.

JANELLE

I know, but what I'm supposed to say anyway? You know she's going to ask.

MARKITA

Tell her I'm out. You don't know where. Just say you don't know. I'll be back this afternoon.

JANELLE

She got us booked for another of them parties tonight.

MARKITA

I be back before that, don't worry.

JANELLE

Don't let anyone see you.

MARKITA

I'll make myself invisible.

JANELLE

You better wear a different dress for that.

MARKITA

You always looking so worried all the time. Come on, everything be all right.

JANELLE

Ok.

MARKITA

Bye.

JANELLE

Yeah.

[Exit MARKITA.]

SCENE 12 **[SLATER's place.]**

[Enter COOTY.]

COOTY

Hey. You got those messages I sent, right?

SLATER

Yeah.

COOTY

I knew there was something going on.

SLATER

Now we see couple of his fool niggers what they doing these days. This is real good though, I can make some use of this. Where are they now?

COOTY

Nobody know. They disappear, gone in thin air.

SLATER

I never seen no air can swallow up a couple niggers just like that. He must be hiding them out. I know the Mexicans from prison. They ain't gonna do like this. Them and me we have an understanding. I know what they do, he don't know. He thinks he knows. I know how to get along with them. These Vietnamese don't matter, they're nothing. I know how to make it so we have a good deal with the Mexicans, but they still keep in their place.

COOTY

How you know they didn't do this?

SLATER

Those dudes are serious gangers, serious. It ain't some kind of joke. Was in prison with those guys, I know them. They ain't gonna do some fool thing like this. He make this up himself. He hides them out himself, then says 'oh it was the big bad Mexicans ab-duct them.' Then he can step in like the big man and save their ass at the last minute. Make his people think he's still a strong leader, when in fact he just hang with his bitches half the time, get drunk the other half. This just some kind of distraction thing. But he don't distract me. I know what's going on here. We say, 'This shows how he lets all sorts of bad things happen because these other groups don't respect us anymore. Are you a Blood are you a Crip? Don't matter. You a black man, you just a nigger to them. They don't respect you and this weak ass leader you got, this Bo is one of the reasons why.' And then we double up on our challenge. He got to fight the duel. And then I got him. He thinks he's real sharp and slippery, but I'll pin him right down. Does he know who that woman was?

COOTY

Just some crazy bitch wander around.

SLATER

I heard it was a little different than that, but that's all right. Always more stories around than true things to stick them on. They fly around by themselves, like clothes in a wash machine. We do like what I told you. Gonna unify the Bloods and the Crips. You know the ones that have the most pull with all the guys on the street?

COOTY

Yeah I know them. They didn't believe me when I told them the first time.

SLATER

They don't think I can do it?

COOTY

They don't think anybody can do it. Say the bad blood is too far gone. Too much of it, way too much. It's like a river flooding through the whole city. They got a point.

SLATER

They got a point, but I got the money. It don't have to be real. It just has to look real. If they can give me two weeks of solid no fighting, no killing, no nothing. Who you think got the most pull in the Crips aside from Bo?

COOTY

Certain people I can approach. I know.

SLATER

Two million in gold.

COOTY

Gold?

SLATER

Gold.

COOTY

Where you get that?

SLATER

Never mind. Just tell them. Make sure they know. They just have to make it look good. For two weeks. And they have to meet with me. In a special place. Neutral territory. I be there, you be there with me.

COOTY

Yeah ok. Then what?

SLATER

We make them shake hands. Cut they wrists. Mix the blood. Swear on the spirits of the ancestors, all of that. Two million in gold. At the end of two weeks, if they all been good, Santa Claus come right to them. Slide right down their chimney. If they bad, then they get ... coal in their stocking. Each lump of this coal is nine millimeters wide.

[Holds up gun.]

COOTY

Yeah yeah ok. But where you get this gold?

SLATER

Never mind. Just go do what I say.

COOTY

Yeah I hope you know where you're going with all of this.

SLATER

Yeah I do. In the meantime, tell that Queena to come on.

[Exit SLATER.]

[Exit COOTY.]

SCENE 13

GRIOT

What makes the world go round and around?

I wonder all the time

Is it money is it love

Is there reason

Is there rhyme?

CHORUS

What is the power that sets one against another?

Brother brother, sister sister

Living today they are dead tomorrow —

Black sun of Los Angeles, ashes, sorrow

GRIOT

What makes the world go around and around

[Exit GRIOT and CHORUS.]

SCENE 14 [BO's Head Quarters.]

LES

I don't want to talk about this too much, I know it's a sore subject and we got a lot of other things going on -- you know that incident?

BO

Incident?

LES

You know, that woman, old lady wander around?

BO

What about it?

LES

Bad sign could lead to worse things still -- disrespecting one of our own women -- like that...

BO

You don't think it was those two that did...whatever?

LES

No I can't picture that, no. It must have been the Mexicans, or maybe them Asians. There's a lot of talk. I didn't want to say this before, but I been thinking about it. There's a lot of bad feeling, discontent, unrest. That's how it starts -- insurrection, mutiny. They think you're weak. To be honest -- I am always honest with you -- I am a straight forward man -- they see that you're weak, you are weak these days. I even been hearing some other things, I don't want to get into.

BO

What's that?

LES

Never mind now. You been under stress, it does things to a man -- affect the mind, affect the body. Affect the spirit, the fighting spirit. That's what you don't get, I been trying to put that across to you.

BO

What do you think I need to do? First of all, what did you hear?

LES

I don't want to get into all that, but one thing: I don't want you do that challenge match.

BO

No?

LES

No, that's crazy. That ain't the way to go.

BO

Before you thought I should do it.

LES

That's right, I did then, but now, no.

BO

My own brother....

LES

That's true, that's it right there. You don't want to hurt your own brother. Then of course, you could get hurt yourself.

BO

That's ridiculous.

LES

But let's look at it here. He's taken away everything from you, not in material terms, we know that, but I'm saying these things go by little leaks and cracks, and before you know it, that whole solid wall that you built it's crumbling all into sand. And what did you build it with? Think what that was. It was one thing – fear. It was fear, and you have to get it back. You have to be able to carry that in your hands like a woman carry a child. You carry that fear right there. And you wield it, that's what you got to have, that's what they need to see. But of course that kind of power, it isn't for everybody. You don't want to do it, that's fine, we think of something else.

BO

No. I decided to do it, so I'm going to. I'll take care of all this. Don't worry.

LES

Yeah, all right. But how you know he's really going to fight you?

BO

What else you think he's gonna do? Shake my hand, come and give me a kiss?

LES

Listen up my man, this is serious. You think he's going to be dealing with you straight? No way. He's bad. He been in the joint. They come out of there, they're like a dog been on a chain in some yard with the hot sun beating on its head and no water and the flies buzzing. What's that dog going to be like you let him loose? You know what. This man is going to kill you. But he isn't going to do it with his two hands, he's going to shoot you. He's going to have somebody else shoot you, he's going to lure you in and when you're getting ready to do your hand to hand combat, somebody else'll be drawing a bead right on your head. We got to deal with this in a different way.

BO

What?

LES

Ambush, ambush in secret, we ambush and then afterward we tell people this that the other. We catch him in a parking lot somewhere. At night we lure him out late, somebody pick him off from far away, infrared scope. He won't know what happened.

BO

I don't know.

LES

He's your brother. You want to put his own blood right on your own hands? That's not the kind a man you are.

BO

The kind of man I am is that I'm going to show people I am not just some business man. Maybe I thought that before. My mind got clouded over. But it's not like that now. I got to handle this in a way that shows everyone what I actually am. Tell him I accept his challenge. You and his people make the arrangements.

[Exit BO.]

[Exit LES.]

SCENE 15 **[SLATER's place.]**

COOTY
She's here, boss.

SLATER
Ok, let her in.

[Enter QUEENA. COOTY exits.]

SLATER
Well now hello there Miss Q. How are things? Been a long time since we've seen each other.

QUEENA
It hasn't been that long.

SLATER
Yeah maybe not.

QUEENA
Look Slater, I know what it is.

SLATER
Oh really, what is it?

QUEENA
I wanted to see you because, I wanted you to understand, when you went away--

SLATER
'Went away' -- sounds kind of nice, you say it like that.

QUEENA
I know it wasn't nice, I know. But you've got to listen to me now. I know what you're thinking.

SLATER
You always know, right? You're a real sharp lady, too sharp for me maybe. Or maybe not.

QUEENA
I cried my eyes out, Slate.

SLATER
And you've got beautiful eyes too now, don't you?

QUEENA

Look, I'm serious. I'm serious here.

SLATER

I'm serious too.

QUEENA

No, come on. Really. Really. I Cried 'till I had headaches....

SLATER

Well, I guess you recovered pretty well.

QUEENA

Not really. There was a lot of stuff to handle, you know all the things there were. The police were coming around.

SLATER

And Bo coming around.

QUEENA

Yeah well, lot of people were. You know it was really bad.

SLATER

Right.

QUEENA

You think that I can just survive out here by myself? What am I supposed to do? I needed help with things. You were always going here, going there. Half the time I don't know where you are anyway or what you're doing or who you're doing it with. And then all at once you're gone. And then I just have to deal with all that. And it was hard for me Slater, it was really hard. And then you know, for a while--

SLATER

There's those words again, 'for a while'.

QUEENA

No look, don't be like that to me now. But I was -- I was there for you.

SLATER

For a while.

QUEENA

I tried the best I could. You don't know what it's like being out here when you're a woman. I can't fight people, I can't shoot people, I can't do anything. You know I always love you.

SLATER

It was real hard for me when you stopped coming to see me.

QUEENA

I know. I'm sorry. Really, I am. You don't know how much I cried. I lay there every night. I couldn't sleep. I got so tired, and in the morning there was just me there and the empty place, the four walls -- and the day went by like a dream of some kind, 'do this, do that...' but I was just floating through it. I was weak, you know, I admit. I needed someone to help me out. But I was always with you inside.

SLATER

But you're with him now, so that's that, isn't that right?

QUEENA

I've been with him for a while, but not really.

SLATER

Maybe and maybe not.

QUEENA

But I don't really want to get back with you. That's not why I came.

SLATER

Oh I see. Don't keep me in suspense.

QUEENA

I heard about your challenge. I think it's an interesting idea, but I don't think it's going to work. He'll never go for it. He's too careful for anything like that. He knows he'd never be able to stand up to someone like you. He isn't any match for you. I remember when you took that one guy apart that night, that was something, I have to admit -- broke him right down to his component parts, yeah that was cool. I don't care for violence, but as everybody knows you definitely can handle yourself, so I think he's never going to go for it. He knows he'd lose. It's a hard problem for him now. He actually wanted to do it.

SLATER

He did?

QUEENA

Oh yeah he was so mad at you, whatever you said to him. Yeah he was ready, willing and able, or at least the first two. I had a hell of a time to talk him out of it.

SLATER

You talked him out of it?

QUEENA

I had to. You want to kill your own brother? I don't want to see that, Slater, I'm sorry.

SLATER

So what do you want to see?

QUEENA

I want to see you again.

SLATER

Thought you said you didn't.

QUEENA

I was just teasing you Slate. I just want to see him out of the picture.

SLATER

What kind of a picture it that going to be where he's going to be out of it? The only way he's going to be out of the picture is I'm going to put him out. You don't understand him, you think anything else going to do it.

QUEENA

We just get together ourselves and then we convince him to fall back a ways. There's enough around for everyone these days.

SLATER

Where you get that idea? There's a big shortage, and I know the reason. He don't know, I know, and I know what to do about it too.

QUEENA

I mean customers, never any lack around here of customers for heroin, and guns too. So after we get that going again, everybody can stay in their own turf, and we don't have to have this brother killing brother kind of thing. I think it's uncivilized. And I don't want to see him dead. I don't love him like you, but I still don't want to see him dead, at least not now, at least not that way. I don't want to see him all messed up and all that. And I want you. You know what I'm saying? I want you again. I'm just so glad to have you back. Oh baby, don't be crazy about this stuff, this is me talking to you.

SLATER

All right. We'll see.

QUEENA

Why do it? Why not both of you meet at my place and talk things over.

SLATER

Last time I met someone at your place, cops rush out and grab me and away I went.

QUEENA

I didn't know they would be there, Slater, you know that I didn't. I went away too.

SLATER

Only for a little while.

QUEENA

Slater, you know you'd been going on a rampage. It was bound to catch up with you. But let's not go over all that now.

SLATER

All right look. I need to show him, and I need to show the others. People have to respect me more than what they have.

QUEENA

Everyone respects you.

SLATER

No not enough. But I'll tell you what. I won't hurt him. We won't fight. We just go off by ourselves and then we'll come back. I just want to talk to him in private. I want to make him see that I can mobilize the people against him if I want. I'm not just the ape he thinks I am, and all the others too. Then we can talk about this unification idea. These other groups are closing in.

QUEENA

Do you promise you won't kill him? The main thing is this we can't be killing each other, because whatever we do these other gangs are trying to kill us off anyway. Bo is whatever he is, but we got to try to work with him. So promise me you won't hurt him ok? At least not too bad, 'cause I know you can do that. Ok? Do you promise?

SLATER

Yes, all right.

QUEENA

I trust you then.

SLATER

Come here.

QUEENA

Not now. I'm too upset by all this. But later, all right?

SLATER

Really?

QUEENA

Yes.

SLATER
Do you promise?

QUEENA
Yes. I do.

SLATER
All right. I don't really want to do it. I never wanted to. It was just a trick. You have to keep my secret. Do you want to stay here tonight? When do I see you again?

QUEENA
I can't tonight. I've got to check on my girls. But pretty soon. All right?

SLATER
Yes. All right.

[Exit both.]

SCENE 16**CHORUS**

There were two gangs in Los Angeles

One called the Bloods and one called the Crips

Black sun of Los Angeles

burning down on nothing

Empty spaces of Los Angeles

where men are killing men

GRIOT

It was a dark night in Los Angeles

Two brothers met by the river,

The stars were overhead

Millions and millions of stars

CHORUS

It was a dark night in Los Angeles

Two brothers met face to face

SLATER

Well I'm glad to see that you could make it Bo, and this time you try to shoot me you

should know: I brought my own.

BO

No need to shoot you, take care of you a different way.

SLATER

That's fine.

BO

I think so.

SLATER

This way we really see who's the best man here, who's going be the real leader that we need in these bad times we're in here. Ain't that right?

BO

That's what I think too. You think you're going to just walk in here, talk this trash and walk away with all my people. But we'll see how that goes.

SLATER

One thing I always thought, you know what that was?

BO

What was that now?

SLATER

Gun was kind of a bad invention, makes it too easy. All sorts of little chicken types running around, think they're going to be some kind a big man.

BO

Is that right?

SLATER

That's the way I see it. Or else all kinds of slick smooth operator types, ladies' man types, think they're going to run a whole gang, two whole gangs, and they ain't never had to get up close to anyone and put their blood right on their hands. You know what I'm saying?

BO

What you know and what you think you know are two different things.

SLATER

But a knife --

[SLATER throws a knife down.]

--a knife cuts through all the lies. A knife will show what's real, a blade cuts through the false so that the true can stand.

[MARKITA and JANELLE begin to move forward as though to place themselves between BO and SLATER.]

GRIOT [to JANELLE and MARKITA]

Get back.

MARKITA

No, I will not get back. You can't do this. They are circling around us while we stand here. They are laughing at us, I can hear them. I have a bad feeling. You must not go through with this. Please.

JANELLE

I know that to you I am nothing. To you I am just a prostitute. But I've known you both since we were children. Don't you remember? Let me talk to each of you in private. We can work something out.

MARKITA

Please -- Slater, Bo -- don't do this.

JANELLE

We are begging you.

MARKITA

Let us talk to you in private.

SLATER

We know the things you do in private.

[The other men laugh.]

BO [to the girls]

Get out of the way.

[to SLATER]

I accept your challenge

[BO picks up the knife.]

MARKITA

Wait, this is insane!

SLATER

Be quiet.

JANELLE

The police are already killing us, and we are killing each other.

MARKITA

I have to say what I see. I see two brothers killing each other, even if one wins, they both die. I see many other deaths, I can feel it all coming.

BO

You have no say here. You're only a woman -- get back.

SLATER

Get back like he says.

[BO and SLATER exit. The CHORUS parts as they leave and

gathers together in their wake.]

GRIOT

And so they walked out into the desert night

So many stars were out
Millions and millions of stars

Think of the distances—
The ages
It would take to cross

The earth is just a small speck of dust

[The CHORUS gathers differently, defining the space in a different
shape so that both are visible again, facing each other.]

GRIOT

And when they got to a certain point
They turned to each other
And one said to the other

SLATER

This is the point in time, this is the point in space

GRIOT

And the other replied

BO

Was it fate that brought us here? Were we destined from the beginning of the world to do
this?

SLATER

Which of us will live, which of us will die?

BO

What is there after death?

SLATER

Is there anything?

BO

The stars pass over us,
Millions

SLATER
The days, the nights
Pass over us

BO
On a day
We rise up from sleep

SLATER
On a night
We walk out into the emptiness

BO
Whom will we encounter?
What will be the end?

SLATER
No one can know

[BO and SLATER exit again, and the CHOR gathers after,
once again as though in their wake.]

GRIOT
The fight of the two brothers
Was long
And was short --
It took seconds, it took hours, it took days, it took years
The fight of the two brothers
Was unbearable to see
Was unbearable to hear

CHORUS
How many things that men do are unspeakable
How many things that men do cannot be told

GRIOT
And then--

[Both JANELLE and MARKITA somehow know what has
happened.]

MARKITA
It's just as I knew, I knew this would happen! I knew!...

JANELLE
He's murdered his brother, with his own hands.

MARKITA

The dead man lies out in the night, bleeding into the dirt.

JANELLE

His body will never move again, his voice will never again be heard.

MARKITA

In a while he will be as cold as this ground.

[Enter SLATER in triumph.]

SLATER

So now, finally. -- Everybody thought I was over with. But now they see what the deal is going to be here. I waited a long time for this. It felt like forever. When you're in there you think you're never coming out. But I came out. I'm going to take back everything I lost when I was gone. I was betrayed. It was my own brother that did it, sold me off to the police -- the White cops who come in here, the Mexican cops who come in here, the Asian cops -- all of them, all treating us like we are something floating in the toilet -- am I right? you know I'm right. And he sold me out right to them. Just so you know. Just so you know! You think I want to stand up here and tell people this? -- my own brother a traitor like that? That was he a lying sneaking around dog? He was my brother. I thought of it on and on when I was in there. He was always the smart one, the slick one, the one who was good in school, all this. That's fine. But I didn't know he was as low as what he was. I don't like to say it, but I want you to know why, I want you to understand. So -- you let his body lie out there. In the sun. Let the truth shine right down. I want everyone to see -- this is what happens to whoever does like that. Let it just lie there and rot. Anyone come and touch it, move it, cover it, burry it -- they be out there too, because they're saying that's where their loyalty is.

MARKITA

It is not right to do this.

SLATER

I ain't hearing nothing about right and wrong. I don't care anything about that. I'm only talking what's going to be, what's going to be, and what is.

JANELLE

You go too far.

SLATER

He should have thought of that before. I said I was going to get him, and I did. And now it's done. It's a great day here -- the two gangs are united now. Now we move ahead. Got all these other groups coming up, we've got to watch out for them. Important that we be strong, be united.

Anybody want to be with me,
That's fine, get on.

Whoever don't want to, that's fine too: get off.
But don't let me catch you
Anywhere under the sun.

Does anybody want out? If so, go now.

[The hall doors swing open.]

All right. Then you're in!

[The hall doors slam shut.]

End of Act One

ACT TWO**SCENE 1 CHORUS/GRIOT****CHORUS**

There were two gangs in Los Angeles

GRIOT

And the situation was terminal
In the city of Los Angeles

CHORUS

Day by day

GRIOT

More killings
In the confusing city
The hot sun burning down

CHORUS

Day by day

GRIOT

In the endless city,
The dangerous labyrinthine town

CHORUS

There were two gangs in Los Angeles

GRIOT

Although just unified
Their hatred for each other

CHORUS

Sister for sister,
Brother for brother

GRIOT

Could not be hidden
Could not be denied

CHORUS

What good can come?—

GRIOT

When brother fights with brother

CHORUS

What good can come?--

GRIOT

In the dark time

Of the world

SCENE 2 [SLATER's bedroom, formerly BO's.]

[SLATER and QUEENA are in bed. He is asleep, she is lying awake.]

GRIOT

Now it is night, it is very quiet

Yes, it is silent—

Shhh

The darkness

Is its own special world.

And though you can't see it,

Yet there is something there --

But what, and where?

[Exit GRIOT]

[Enter GHOST OF BO. He has the head of a dog.]

QUEENA [Screams]

What...who?--what is it? There's somebody here. Slater, Slater! Get up!

What are you? Who are you?-- Slater!...

A black shape is in my eyes like a cloth
the room is full of darkness
a wicked darkness an evil darkness
I spit on you, you are a demon come out of hell to choke me
you try to sit on my heart, you try to suck my life away
I can feel it draining out of me, I can't breathe. The shadows strangle me.
I call on my spirits to protect me from the hands that flow up out of the night
like waves onto a beach -- flow away from me now!
Get away from me! Get away!

[GHOST OF BO removes the dog's head.]

GHOST OF BO

Be still. You do not need to worry.

[pause, indicating the head.]

Do you like it?

QUEENA

Who are you? What kind of devil are you?

GHOST OF BO

You know who I am.

QUEENA

Slater!

GHOST OF BO

He is asleep. He will stay asleep. You cannot wake him. Only you can see me. Only you can hear me. Hear me.

QUEENA

Bo?

GHOST OF BO

Yes. Just as I was. The dogs tore me to pieces like an old shirt. Finally the women came with their faces covered. You were not with them. I know what you were doing instead.

QUEENA

I have to survive.

GHOST OF BO

We will see for how long. Beware of the thing that is nearest. The god is near, but is difficult to grasp. The devil is also near. And he is never difficult to find. You've been warned.

[GHOST OF BO turns to exit.]

QUEENA

Bo! Wait. Let me know one thing.

GHOST OF BO

What?

QUEENA

Tell me, where is the danger? Tell me.

GHOST OF BO

I have already told you what you need.

QUEENA

You haven't told me enough .

The ways are dark here, the world is all spider webs,

I don't know how to grasp it, it is all darkness. I am blind.

But the blood inside of me is churning around, it is ringing, it is on fire .

You must guide me through this hell where I am,

you must guide me. I command you, I command you!

GHOST OF BO

I do not any longer need to hear the ravings

of a disordered mind, the damned

do not need to hear the living.

QUEENA

Tell me one piece of guidance

in this pit where I have to crawl like an insect,

tell me where the danger is the greatest.

Is it from the yellow men? Is it from the brown men?

Does it come from the east? Does it come from the west?

From which way does it come?

GHOST OF BO

It does not come from any way. You will find it soon enough. Look in your purse.

[Exit GHOST OF BO.]

QUEENA

Wait! Tell me one thing more. I need to know--

SLATER [waking up]

Hey baby, what's wrong? What's going on?

QUEENA

Nothing. Nothing's wrong.

SLATER

Nothing? You're all shaking. You're all sweating like a fever.

QUEENA

No I'm fine. Really. Slate. I'm fine.

SLATER

You sure?

QUEENA

Yes. Go back to sleep now.

SLATER

Well if you're all right, then what's all this? Hey. You're upset about something. I can't have you getting all depressed, now can I? I got enough problems, you know. Got to keep my focus, my concentration. Trying to bring the two gangs together. Been trying to do that for so long, now I've finally done it. So many people after me, I don't know which way to look first. Can't sleep at night. Lie awake, hearing all the sounds in the night, wondering what they are. Sirens and gun shots and more sirens...ambulance...wake up feeling all around in the dark, feeling for the wall, the light switch, feeling for my gun, and I don't know if it was real or just a dream, thinking 'What if this happens? What if that happens?'

QUEENA

You were sleeping pretty good a little while ago.

SLATER

Yeah that's because you're here. You always calm me down. All the little ways that you have. I really need that. Hey...

QUEENA

What?

SLATER

Come on.

QUEENA

Come on what?

SLATER

You know what. Come on over here.

[He pulls her toward him.]

QUEENA

Don't pull me like that, Slate. I'm not a piece of taffy.

SLATER

You got to calm me down again. Then I can sleep real peaceful . Just like I was, all right?

QUEENA

I said don't pull me. You can't keep treating me like this. Will you wait a second...

SLATER

I'm not going to wait a second. I know what it is. You're thinking of Bo again. You wanted me to get rid of him I thought -- right? So that we could be together. You didn't really want to share anything. That's not like you, you don't want to share. Didn't you want us to be together?

QUEENA

Stop grabbing me like that. You do not own me. Why are you like this all of a sudden?

[He grabs her roughly.]

SLATER

You're mine now. As long as you stay mine, you'll be all right. I remember what you did. I know what it was. I forgive you, because I love you. But you've got to love me back. I need someone, just one single person, in the whole world --in my whole life -- has got to love me. And that's you. And I really want it to be you, because I love you completely. I always did. I can't help it. But I'm not a fool. And if you betray me again, either in action or in words, or even in your mind, if you don't love me anymore, and show me that you do, then I'm not a fool, you know, I'm not some plaything for you -- I don't know what will happen then. Queena, my queen, don't push me into that. Now love me, the way that I need you to do.

[Enter 3 GANGERS in a hurry, without thinking.]

2ND GANGER

Yo Slater!

1ST GANGER
Slate!

SLATER
Yeah? What? What is it?

[They are brought up short, embarrassed.]

1ST GANGER
Sorry. We got bad news. Them two, you know, Mac9, DJ?

2ND GANGER
They ain't just flying all around, like we thought.

3RD GANGER
They been taken hostage after all.

SLATER
Who did it?

1ST GANGER
Mexicans, like everybody thought.

2ND GANGER
Sent some pieces of their clothing.

3RD GANGER
And pictures. They've got them in some warehouse, looks like.

SLATER
Warehouse? Pictures! Clothing? Where?

1ST GANGER
We don't know. Working on it.

SLATER
I want them back.

1ST GANGER
There's ransom. Three guys pulled up out of nowhere--

SLATER
There's no such thing as "pull up out of nowhere." You're slacking and that's how this happens. Bo let everything be a party. Now they think we're a bunch of clowns -- they can just abduct, just "pull up." There should not be any pull up, any abduct. There should be

shooting! -- they don't think we're even worth shooting anymore. They think they can just do whatever.

1ST GANGER

Well...anyway...

SLATER

Anyway nothing!

1ST GANGER

Sorry.

QUEENA

Slater, calm down

SLATER

All right. All right.

1ST GANGER

Anyway they said it's a ransom. Four million for both, two million each. Got three days.

SLATER

Four million for both, got three days. Well that's just great. We had our differences over the years, but I didn't think they were that bad, knew a lot of them in the joint. Thought we had an understanding. I have to admit, I'm surprised.

QUEENA

Well I'm not. This is only one example of how so many things have gotten out of hand. You say you've unified the gangs, this is your big claim to fame. But have you, do they actually trust each other? Is this an example of how they do? How do you know your former Bloods didn't sell out former Crips to the Mexicans, and will maybe even collect part of the ransom that you're going to pay them? And meanwhile we're dying out there -- going broke! No heroin anywhere. How are we supposed to live? Where did it all go? No one can figure it out, and you can't figure it out, and you don't do anything. They are destroying us, disrespecting us. I knew those two, and I know what they did, which you do not want to look at. They were worthless, but that doesn't matter. These spics and the chinks too--

1ST GANGER

Vietnamese.

QUEENA

Whatever -- are crawling all over us these days. And what do you do about it? Bo would have had some ideas. I have to check on my girls. At least they're making money. I'll talk to you later.

[Exit QUEENA.]

SLATER
Vietnamese in on this?

3RD GANGER
They might be helping to hide them out. Not sure.

2ND GANGER [indicating 1st Ganger]
He said it was one of them came to him first--

1ST GANGER
--Yeah.

2ND GANGER
--but then it was the Mexicans come to us.

3RD GANGER
The cops coming around too 'cause of Bo, you know, his body. They crawling all over us for that.

SLATER
Can't be bothered with them blue-ass baboons right now, pitch 'em some bribes. Which ones is it?

1ST GANGER
Those two detectives, Terrell and Morgan.

SLATER
Give them a hundred thousand each. That'll fix them for a while. Now as for these Mexicans, here's what we do: tell them no.

1ST GANGER
No?

SLATER
No. No deal. I'm not paying.

1ST GANGER
Thought you said you want them back.

SLATER
I do. But I'm not paying money for my own men. No. Go tell them.

2ND GANGER
Slate, those two guys they're crazy, but they're useful.

SLATER

I know. We'll get them back, don't worry.

1ST GANGER

Don't want to see them get killed.

3RD GANGER

We already had all these losses.

SLATER

We can't let ourselves be railroaded like this. I'm not giving in to any Mexicans, nor Vietnamese either. Tell them that, tell both of them.

[They are silent.]

You know what you have to do, so go do it. I'll be at my other place. Don't let anybody know where I am. Tell Lester I need to see him. And make sure you follow her wherever she goes. And her girls too, especially that one.

[Exit SLATER.]

SCENE 3 [Same location.]

1ST GANGER

Didn't know she was here.

3RD GANGER

I don't trust her.

2ND GANGER

Don't know who can you trust anymore.

3RD GANGER

Some dude, a month ago he would shoot you in the back of your head if he saw you on the wrong side of town, now all of a sudden he's your good buddy and you have to hang with him, eat with him, just about sleep with him, and trust him too with your own life. I don't think so.

1ST GANGER

Yeah I don't like it, and then on top of that we got people like her trying to run things behind the scenes.

2ND GANGER

Like she know what she talking about. Nobody going to put a bullet in her head.

3RD GANGER

No they put something else someplace else.

2ND GANGER

Oh yeah. She sliding around every which way these days. I heard she do a lot of business with them rappers.

1ST GANGER

I don't care about that, but I heard she's hanging with them Mexicans herself. Some of our guys watching them, saw her get out of a car, walk right into one of their hang out places. Had herself all blinged up.

3RD GANGER

Does Slater know that?

1ST GANGER

He don't know nothing -- damn him. All he knows how to do is order hits left and right, anybody look at him sideways. That's why we short numbered, he killing off his own men -- our men, our side, that used to be Bloods like him. He supposed to be loyal to us. We was loyal to him whole time he was locked up in there like a sardine in a can three years. And then he comes out, this the thanks we get.

2ND GANGER

He's paranoid -- that's what that did, his going away like that, that's what it did.

3RD GANGER

And now he think everybody out here he can't trust them no more, when -- hey, we waiting for him the whole time, smuggle dope into him, extra cash...tried to smuggle some bitches into him once, but couldn't fit 'em through the slot.

2ND GANGER

We gonna tell him?

1ST GANGER

You want to get your head chopped off ? He so nuts, he think we selling him out to the Mexicans ourselves just because we know about it.

3RD GANGER

Yeah maybe we tell him later, not just yet.

2ND GANGER

Then he say you holding out on him.

1ST GANGER

We take our time, think about it some more—

2ND GANGER

Does he know what he's doing with her?

1ST GANGER

Who know, man. We got to do this other stuff now. Let's just go. Find out where those two are -- be sure. We didn't think they were even captured. Everybody thought they just went off someplace -- we need to know what's happening. So get out there, and when you throw those bribes to those cops, make sure you get some information. Be nice though, be nice.

[Exit all.]

SCENE 4

[DJ and MAC9 in captivity, tied up sitting on floor.]

MAC9

Where are we anyway? How we get into this, man?

DJ

Yeah you say you want to check out some ladies, so yeah that's cool, so this where we end up....

MAC9

You came with me didn't you?

DJ

I'm sorry I did....

MAC9

Yeah I'm sorry I ever knew you to begin with ok?

DJ

Yeah that's fine, that's fine....

[pause]

All right...look...

MAC9

Yeah I know I know I know--

DJ

--we got to cut this out

MAC9

Yeah... sorry. Sorry, man. It don't help, you're right.

DJ

No problem. Got to keep our heads here. How we gonna get out of here?

MAC9

In some kind of a meat locker or something.

DJ

That's pretty funny, yeah that's pretty funny.

MAC9

They got a real sense of humor these greasy--

DI

You bunch of spics, you bunch of grease eating, dog eating--

MAC9

Bean farting scum bag fuckers --

DJ

--bunch of no-dick dog-fucking roach-faced pig shit eating... maybe we can get them to come in here – ha, what you think?

MAC9

Yeah if they did, we could take 'em out, we could take 'em out. Come on, you fucks, take you all on...!

DJ

Yeah, we don't care...come on! Yeah that's right!

MAC9

Come on, chicken shit!

DJ

You can kiss my Black ass, you bunch of faggots!

[They pause, listening.]

MAC9

Pretty damned quiet.

DJ

Don't hear nothing.

MAC9

No, nothing.

DJ

No...no...

MAC9

Nothing...I can't hear...

DJ

Don't matter what you do, we keep coming anyway, you bunch of scum-faced--

MAC9

You think you gonna put us out of business, run us out of town, get all the dope business for yourself ? ha? -- no, no -- ain't gonna happen, ain't gonna.

DJ

We keep coming, that's right, you're dead, man -- do whatever, you're still dead.

MAC9

You're a dead man walking and talking.

DJ

What you talking over there, ha?

[to M9] Seems like I can hear them through this wall here.

MAC9

What you boys doing over there, ha? Sucking each other off?

DJ

Fucking your mother again, ha?

MAC9

What you talking? you spic chicken shit -- even when you got me locked up—ain't that right?

DJ

You still chicken even then, too afraid to come in here.

MAC9

No two ways. Spic always chicken, yeah that's right! Yeah that's right! —

[Breaking off.]

Damn damn damn -- this the way we end up? like this? Listen to this. Look at this. Shit man, that's what I say --shit-- you know? Coming up here to this nothing place, this the way I got to end up? Them other bastards getting rich, they getting everything. We end up like this?

DJ

That fool-ass Bo, and that son-of-a-bitch Slater -- they could have sprung us out of this by now.

MAC9

That's right. We should have shot Slater when we could -- he cause all this trouble for us. We wouldn't even been out here this part of town if it hadn't been for him and his absolute fool challenge thing -- damn!

DJ

No sense saying it now.

MAC9

We done for man, we done for, this is it....

[pause]

DJ

No no no, don't say that. We ain't done yet.

MAC9

Yeah that's right. You're right. Who knows what might happen.... Maybe not, who knows.

[pause]

...yeah...

[pause]

I keep having all these dreams, strange dreams, I never had so many of them before. Used to just lie down and that was it.

DJ

Yeah, course we always was drunk.

MAC9

Yeah, just lie down, room spin around a little, then -- black.

DJ

Yeah then, light -- morning, get up, get out there again....

MAC9

Now I'm having all these dreams -- I'm fighting with something, it's not even a man, just -- I don't know what. But I'm wrestling with it -- then shooting -- all of a sudden there's a gun there, and I'm firing... and then I'm trying to make friends with him. All of a sudden it is some guy, I've got my arm around him, hugging him --all this...

DJ

Or you have those ones you're running and running-- and I'm trying to catch this car, it's night or it's a tunnel, I can see the tail lights. I'm running and I'm just about to get it and the tail lights -- these red lights -- turn into...candy.

MAC9

Candy?

DJ

Yeah candy. And then I'm eating it, real fast, like I don't want anybody to get it from me... I guess, I don't know....

MAC9

I keep thinking of that old playground we had near the school back in Compton. You remember we used to go there, hang out?

DJ

Yeah yeah. I remember I used to lie there on the grass in the afternoon, after they let us out -- look up at the sky, see the jets going by way up, making that streak of white across, way way up, in the sky.

MAC9

Used to reach up my hand like I could grab them.

DJ

Yeah or at night the stars, you know.

MAC9

Yeah.... Remember those two girls we used to know? They up here, ain't they?

DJ

Yeah they up here, they around.

[pause]

MAC9

They got to get us out of here. Don't you think?

DJ
Them girls?

MAC9
No, all of them – Bo, Slater, whoever’s out there-- don’t you think?

DJ
Yeah, I hope so. I hope so.

[End of scene]

SCENE 5 **[SLATER’S place. They are smoking and drinking. It is as if they are in a bunker, taking a break from the ongoing war.]**

SLATER
So you been watching those two girls ?

COOTY
Yeah, sure.

SLATER
What they been doing?

COOTY
Nothing. They just a couple hos, addicts too, they big time dope fiends. That’s why she with that Vietnamese guy, she want him for dope. That’s it, really.

SLATER
Well them muthers got the supply. We don’t have it, that’s for sure. Another thing: set up a meeting with those two detectives. Make sure they’ve got their bribes first.

COOTY
Did it the other day.

SLATER
Oh yeah? Why didn’t you tell me?

COOTY

I thought you knew.

SLATER

How am I supposed to know?

COOTY

I don't know...common sense, hey I—

SLATER

Never mind, never mind. Just tell those two detectives I want to meet with them. Make sure they know I'll come alone, no guards, wherever they want. Understand?

COOTY

Yeah, ok.

SLATER

So -- Lester out there?

COOTY

Yeah, he's waiting.

SLATER

Ok. Send him in.

[COOTY ushers in LES, then exits.]

LES

What are you going to do about these two? And then there is a lot of – dissent, I think I'd say. Lot of discontent.

SLATER

About what?

LES

The men you promised that gold too. And they haven't got it yet.

SLATER

They have to wait.

LES

If there's a problem with money, like I say, there's a lot of potential with those music people. I told you before. Others going in that direction, you don't want to.

SLATER

I'm not going to become a pimp and dope pusher to those jerks.

LES

You doing that kind of thing anyway.

SLATER

No. I don't want to be involved in all that. I've got other plans. We got to be unified and stay that way. We got to keep watch on all these other groups trying to come in here. I don't like what those music jerks are doing. They put strange ideas in people's minds. Funny ideas. Stupid ideas. Maybe I got to be a nigger. I don't have to be a fool, a clown. Met up with some very interesting guys in prison. It's a good place for that. Made me think about things. Where are we going here these days, where's all this going? I don't say using drugs is good, I don't say selling them is good. I don't push, I sell. You never see me trying to get someone to go in that direction. But if they need that because that's where they are, then fine, we can handle that. I'm taking care of my people the way they are right now, but I'm hoping for something better down the road. But we don't need all these funny ideas from these fool ass singers, musicians, all this. We don't need that, we need to be real. I'm completely real. Maybe that's a limitation. But at least I am what I am and I know what's what. No, I ain't going with that.

LES

All right, that's fine. Then where you going to get the money, not just to ransom these two, but other things that need to get done around here? – more cops to bribe, and then the promises you made to the gangsters – they're all expecting that gold.

SLATER

They'll get it. I'm dealing with these things in my own way.

LES

You ain't telling me?

SLATER

Not now.

LES

A man of mystery. How can I help you, you don't talk to me? You don't have the money, do you?

[SLATER exiting.]

SLATER

I got to go check on my men. But I'll take you up on that other idea.

LES

All right. Good. You won't regret that either.

SLATER

When we supposed to go?

LES

Not sure yet --

SLATER

That Markita involved in this?

LES

No, no. This is strictly business. He fools around with her, but it ain't nothing. But meeting with them is harder to arrange than meeting with the Mexicans..

SLATER

All right. But make it happen pretty soon. Look, after this is done, I want you to get rid of both of those girls.

LES

All right. When?

SLATER

Later. Make it look like part of the general confusion. Talk to you later. And say hello to Queena for me when you see her.

[Exit SLATER.]

[Exit LES.]

SCENE 6 [A street.]

QUEENA

You just coming from the great man?

LES

Yeah. Try to talk some sense into him. How are things with your girls?

QUEENA

They're fine, that's cool.

LES

No I don't want to hear 'that's cool'. I been hearing one of them been fooling with one of

the Vietnamese. Don't tell me any stuff. You got to step on that, ok? He already paranoid enough. We can't have some of our prostitutes be a security risk like that. He's crazy enough, hard enough to control.

QUEENA

You know, this Slater.... Lester, do you think he's really still necessary anyway?

LES

Is he "necessary"? What ? -- you want to bump him off, is that it?

QUEENA

I didn't say that.

LES

You didn't say it, but that's what you're thinking, [laughs] ha ha, oh yeah, oh yeah....

QUEENA

No don't be putting words in my mouth. You can see how he's running things into the ground worse than Bo, he's so paranoid. You say yourself.

LES

No, I don't think I need to be hearing this from you. Your job is just what we were saying, ok? You run your girls up to those rap hip hop jokers and all that. You keep them happy, you keep them occupied and you keep them out of our way, and this is what you do. I don't like Slater any more than you, but we got to stay with our own people and not be bumping each other off behind our own backs. That is just what the Mexicans would like, and the Asian gangs too. So now, no more 'is he necessary' and all that. You get your ass back there and keep him occupied and keep him happy and run your girls to those hip hop star assholes and keep them occupied -- in the way that I know only you can do. See you later, and make sure I know where you are.

[Exit LES.]

[QUEENA alone.]

QUEENA

You think you're going to talk to me like that? We'll see. Nobody's going to talk. To. Me. Like that. You are going to see.

[Exit QUEENA.]

SCENE 7 [SLATER'S PLACE.]

[SLATER looking out window.]

[QUEENA enters.]

QUEENA
Are you all right?

SLATER
Yes, I'm all right.

QUEENA
You've been very tense.

SLATER
Lot on my mind, can't help it.

QUEENA
What's going on here these days slater you know I'm kind of worried. Why have the Mexicans done this? I thought you knew them.

SLATER
Someone putting them up to this. They want to get a lock on them, and make everybody fight each other. That's what they're doing. Seen it before, used to pull stuff like that in prison. The guards would make one group fight another, make that one fight a third, then the second one fight the first one, round and round. They get a kick out of it. Los Angeles going to be one big prison yard for them. They build up one gang, push down the others, one starts popping back up, they let them come on a little while just to push back the other two, always make sure to keep everybody off balance. This is how it works.

QUEENA
Who's "they"? – if you're so smart.

SLATER
Who you think "they" is? Hear you hanging with Lester a lot. That's cool. You ain't my wife, you never was. I don't care.

QUEENA
I don't hang with him like that.

SLATER
Yeah I know that too.

QUEENA
You know all kinds of things.

SLATER

Yes, I do. Despite what everybody thinks. He has connections with those record company people – all these singers, dancers think they're going to be gangsters -- funny joke, you know, that's how I see that, but put that aside. I know – everybody knows, have to be blind in both eyes not to know – this music stuff these days, it isn't music, it's something else. In prison we didn't have no music, only music was the sound of some guy getting his head busted open on the concrete floor, only sound was some other dude getting raped, someone getting stabbed – and they're lying there bleeding – they're dying, they know they are. No one helps them. He's trying to hold his own guts in with his own two hands, yes I've seen that – hold his own blood in, and it's flowing out all over, make a big pool on the floor, and he's crying for help. But no one helps them. And they die. Who sent me in there? You know who did it.

QUEENA

No I don't, Slater. I don't. We've been through this. I don't really know who the people behind it were. I mean, it was probably Bo...

SLATER

I know that. But who helped him, besides you?

QUEENA

I didn't really do anything. You know. Please Slater, we've been through this before.

SLATER

No, we haven't.

QUEENA

I was serious when I said I was broken up when you went in. I know I didn't go to see you, but it would have been dangerous for me to do that. I had to survive out here alone. That's the truth. You know.

SLATER

That's fine. That's all over with. But while I was in there you changed a little. Got all kinds of ideas, new friends. Bo had a lot of money, it seems like. I had money too, if I didn't I'd still be in prison. That's how I know what he must have had, I know there are only certain ways to get that kind of money. So then, with that money, you developed a lot of new friends. We don't even see most of them around here, but they're around anyway. Know why? What they do – that's around: dope, guns, everything. I can't get on my high horse, I'm doing all that too. But they have a way -- this special group I'm thinking of – they have a way of pretending they're above all that, that some of the stuff they do is "art" capital A and all that. That's what the music business is these days, it's like some kind of poison that just flows into everybody, in their mind. I don't care. These gangers out here I got to deal with, half of them are crazy, other half are getting there. That's fine as far as I'm concerned. That just makes it easier for me. But those record company muthers do a

lot of other things. I'm seeing all sorts of funny connections, I've been seeing them for a while.

QUEENA

I think you're imagining things. Really you always do. You've been like this for a while.

SLATER

It's not so simple as that.

QUEENA

A lot of things have happened, I know. When you were in there it was a bad time for you. It was for me too. Despite what you think. Some things have changed out here. No one knows what's happening. I don't know where it's all going to lead. Bo didn't have any more money than you did, less probably. He was always spending it left and right on women and fancy cars and fancy clothes and fancy restaurants and throwing big parties left and right. He liked to have a good time. When time would run out, he'd wind up the clock again, and want to have some more. The champagne flowed, like a river of diamonds from one end of Los Angeles to the other. I walked out of one of his parties, out into the night, and then I came back; I walked out again, and then came back once more. Why? – I was bored. I was bored the whole time. Bored and lonely. About to lose my mind. I think of him a lot, that's true. Everybody misses him. But he wasn't real. None of it was. While all that huge party was going on, other things were happening right in front of us. Bo didn't notice. Because he didn't, nobody else did. Or if they did, they shut up about it. He had a temper too, you know – different from you, more sly and sneaky. But it was just as dangerous.

SLATER

I'm not dangerous to you.

QUEENA

I know. And I'm sorry for everything, but I didn't have anything to do with you being sent up like that. I don't know who did that, and I never wanted to know. Because that would have been dangerous for me too. I was afraid. I was afraid then, and I'm afraid all the time now. Sometimes I don't even know why I am, but I am.

SLATER

I keep seeing my brother. Used to make fun of people who said they saw ghosts and all that. Remember my old aunt, grandmother's sister – she have all this old time stuff, roots and things, stories about all that. But I keep seeing him. Saw him in the window the other day, standing right there. The light was streaming through. And it was him. He was looking out. He didn't notice me. It was like he was thinking of something. And then he walked out through the window, through the light, like it was a curtain and he went through it. I've seen him a bunch of times. I keep having these bad dreams. I killed a bunch of men, but I always shot them. You shoot a person – a lot of people don't know what that is. A bullet does funny things to someone. You can really feel it. You can see it. But when you

stab someone, you kill them with your own hands...that's a different thing. I hated him then. He never respected me, he always thought he was better than me. Then, after a while, I couldn't stop thinking about him. I was drinking a lot then. Then the dreams started. I stopped drinking, but they kept on – bad dreams, like I'm wrestling with something that's not even a man. And the dreams kept coming. Then I began to see him during the day. I don't know why I'm having all of this. Will you stay here with me tonight? You know, out on the balcony you can see the stars and the hills. You look so beautiful, in the dim light like that. Balcony out this way...Ok?

QUEENA

All right. Yes, all right.

SCENE 8 [JANELLE and MARKITA, their place.]

[JANELLE waiting.]

[Enter MARKITA.]

JANELLE

You just coming from Queena? Her royal highness....

MARKITA

Oh yeah. Highness is right. She got so much attitude, it's a wonder she can even get through the door. Her head swollen up like I don't know what.

JANELLE

Yeah it going to explode pretty soon I think.

MARKITA

Anyway she says there's a "unification party" -- boy what garbage, Slater's idea – both the gangs unified now. So we all celebrate. They're having some kind of big meeting, then big party after. So of course we got to be there.

JANELLE

Yeah ok.

MARKITA

You got any idea where she went, that old woman?

JANELLE

No. No, she gone she run off. Guess she didn't like our cooking.

MARKITA

Don't blame her there. Housekeeping neither.

JANELLE

I almost hope they don't bother to get them two back. They're worthless anyway, look what they did.

MARKITA

Yeah I don't know. We weren't there, we don't know.w

JANELLE

They must have done something. Had her eye bashed up, had a bunch of things bashed up.

MARKITA

Should a taken her to the hospital.

JANELLE

Soon as we say that she start going crazy just about.

MARKITA

Yeah I don't know what she was so afraid of.

JANELLE

We had to be afraid t go there not her. Police bound to be there, they bound to recognize us. I didn't really want to do it.

MARKITA

Yeah I know. Person like that, wander around, who knows what they're thinking. Well she run off now anyway

JANELLE

They got one more day to get them out

MARKITA

Guess so. Guess that what they're going to be talking about.

JANELLE

You sneaking around to see Jimmy, is that it?

MARKITA

A little. I don't think anybody know, they so distracted.

JANELLE

I don't know.... we getting low though...

MARKITA

Yeah that's another thing. They got a real good supply, and then if they don't, got all kinds of pills too

JANELLE

Be careful.

[MARKITA says nothing.]

JANELLE

You know?

MARKITA

Yeah I will.

JANELLE

When we got to be there?

MARKITA

Tonight at 10, then tomorrow they got that party. I be back before all that don't worry.

JANELLE

Well I got to go out anyway. Lester say he want to talk to me.

MARKITA

About what?

JANELLE

I don't know.

MARKITA

Well he's going to ask you to spy on me. Right?

JANELLE

No he won't.

MARKITA

How do you know?

JANELLE

Cause he knows I won't do it. I don't know what he wants. Maybe he's tired of dealing with Queena and he's going to make us the big time madams, how about that? What you think?

MARKITA

Well tell me everything when you get back.

JANELLE

I will, don't worry.

[They embrace and both exit.]

SCENE 9 [The three gangers. They are playing dice.]

[severally]
"...cards and dice
cards and dice..."

2nd GANGER

Hey man come on, throw down.

"...who throw once
and who throw twice..."

3RD GANGER

I got to put my vibrations on it.

1ST GANGER

Yeah cool.

3RD GANGER

All right – boom.

2ND GANGER

No.

[Takes money.]

3RD GANGER

What's happening here anyway?

2ND GANGER

Don't know.

3RD GANGER

Don't want to think about it.

1ST GANGER

Got to put our feelers out now in every direction

3RD GANGER

We on our own kind of.

2ND GANGER [shaking the dice]

Oh yeah -- north south east west --

1ST GANGER

Everywhere. Throw them suckers down!

2ND GANGER

Bang!

3RD GANGER

All right.

[3RD GANGER takes money back.]

3RD GANGER

Got the Mexicans over here, Vietnamese over there. Since we had this unification thing --

2ND GANGER

Man what a joke that is.

1ST GANGER

[Shaking dice. Throwing:]

Boom.

2ND GANGER

No! Give me that [dice]. This just like shooting -- dice kind of like a gun.

3RD GANGER

Gun kind of like dice --

2ND GANGER [shaking]

Once--

Twice --

1ST GANGER

Come on.

2nd GANGER [Throwing.]
Bang.

1st GANGER
No.

[1st takes money.]

1st GANGER
Yeah you telling me. Bloods still gonna be Bloods, Crips still gonna be Crips.

3rd GANGER
Don't matter how you think you gonna smash 'em all together--

2nd GANGER
Like some kind of refried beans.

3rd GANGER
It aint gonna work.

1st GANGER
Some of those dudes we got now they solid. But some kind of shaky, you can't tell which way they gonna tip one minute to the next.

3rd GANGER
They're watching us, we're watching them. Both watching the Mexicans, Vietnamese.

2ND GANGER
We got to be like a bunch of snails, two four six eyes looking all around every way.

1ST GANGER
Yeah

3RD GANGER
Come on. [dice]

Baby needs a new 10 millimeter

[throws]
Bang.

1ST GANGER
And then we got the cops and they hammering us about Bo.

2ND GANGER

They ain't satisfied they got they hands out more. I say how much one dead nigger be worth? It can't be that much. Now all of a sudden we real valuable, you know?

2ND GANGER [with dice]

Shake it but don't break it my good luck charms--

Boom.

3RD GANGER

No. [takes money]

Maybe they know we getting hard up, what you think?

1ST GANGER

I don't know what they know, tell the truth.

2ND GANGER

We can't let it show. And then this hostage thing, we got to deal with this. We losing our grip here, you know, that's what I'm thinking.

3RD GANGER

Yeah we hard up, but that Slater ain't no hard up. He got the money, I know he does. Bo had so much, I don't know where he got it all, but he did. What the hell you think Slater want to take him out for? That's why -- soon as he step out the prison door, they open the gate first thing he does, boom, like a race horse.

2ND GANGER

His own brother too. They weren't friends, I know that, but it wasn't that bad

1ST GANGER

That's right.

2ND GANGER

Not natural.

3RD GANGER

No that's right.

1ST GANGER

It's natural enough if you got money that I want. Then it's natural for sure.

3RD GANGER

Yeah he's holding out on us and on them two -- DJ, MAC 9 -- they sitting there. They going to have their brains blown out just because of this cheap-ass Slater?

2ND GANGER
Yeah I know.

3RD GANGER
Ain't right.

1ST GANGER
No.

2ND GANGER
Now we going to have a party tomorrow night.

3RD GANGER
Oh, we unified now, oh ain't that nice. One of these niggers shoots me dead in the parking lot, you can put UNIFIED on my gravestone.

1ST GANGE
Yeah come on. He say we got to meet him at his place now. He wants to talk strategy.

2ND GANGER
Strategy -- ha, yeah I got a strategy right here -- boom, [holds up gun]

[As at opening.]

Cards and dice
Cards and dice
Who throw once
And who throw twice
Whatever gonna be
Ain't gonna be nice

2ND GANGERS [throws]
Snake eyes.

3RD GANGERS
Ok gimme that all back, my man, ok. [takes money]

1ST GANGERS
Come on, let's go.

[Exit all.]

SCENE 10 [A nightclub. The others waiting.]

[Enter SLATER.]

SLATER

Well all right everyone – all right. As you know, things are going very well. Very well. We are on the path to taking back losses that we have had, and reestablishing our power. And our respect.

[Enter QUEENA, unexpected. Barging in.]

QUEENA

Wait! Wait! I've been outside. I couldn't help overhearing. you think that things are going well? Well?!

[The men are annoyed at her. She is out of place.]

2ND GANGER

What you want here?

QUEENA

Our men are sitting...somewhere, we don't even know where. Right now. And you say things are going well?

SLATER

What do you want to do here?

QUEENA

I came here to give you this.

[QUEENA puts large envelope of cash on table.]

QUEENA

I don't have that much money. But I have this much.

LES

Where'd you get that?

QUEENA

I got it. You say you're not willing to spend your own money to save your own bloods that these Mexicans have locked up. Well you don't have to. I'm giving it to you right here myself.

SLATER

What you bringing this to me now for? Why are you so fired up about this?

QUEENA

This is what it is. I happen to know things that you don't know, but you should. And the reason that I do is because I listen to people. Amazing concept there, yes. Instead of talking all the time, giving speeches all the time, shouting orders, chopping people's heads off left and right like they were a row of sugar cane, I listen to them. And because I do, I know that they are seriously angry. You let these two brothers that have done so much for us sit there like a couple of sacks of potatoes in some old cellar. Who knows what these Mexicans might be doing to them. Well here you have the money that you need right there. I'm giving it to you now. In front of everybody. You don't have to put down anything at all to get them back, you have it right there.

1ST GANGER [examining contents of envelope]

It's only a hundred thousand, 50 each.

SLATER

I thought you said we shouldn't give in to the Mexicans like this.

QUEENA

I didn't mean you shouldn't ransom them at all. I just meant not at that price.

SLATER

Well I guess you know everything does have its price.

QUEENA

Yes that's right. And that's how I know that that was too much, too much, especially for two men of such doubtful character. You've got to have your cake and eat it both. Don't you know anything? You get the men back, and at the same time we don't spend such a crazy sum of money, but just enough. And then they respect you more. They won't think you're such a pushover, and our men won't think you're such a heartless dictator.

SLATER

I don't need your advice your money either.

QUEENA

Well I think we need to change things around here. In fact I know we do. We need leadership. Someone has got to have it. You know what I'm saying? Someone has got to have it.

[Exit QUEENA.]

1ST GANGER

Well Slate, I don't know if she knows what she's saying--

SLATER

She doesn't.

1ST GANGER

But you know--

2ND GANGER

Yeah are we going to make an offer?

3RD GANGER

Spring those guys, get them out of there?

SLATER

No. After all, they wanted to be gangers: this is it, man, this is it. No, no bargain. No deal. Neither way. I don't want them expensive, don't want them cheap.

3RD GANGER

They're our men.

SLATER

They 're men, that's right, I can't help it. This is what we have to do. We let the other gangs think they can jerk us around, make us bargain, make us get down and crawl -- 'oh please, sir, can I have my men back now...?' No. That's not going to happen. I liked those guys, unlike so many others here I know. But they were strong, they knew what they had to do in the world, and they did it. This was the path they chose. I wanted to talk strategy, but none of that is needed now. Therefore, we reject all overtures from any quarter now. We keep ourselves unified, we keep ourselves strong. Watch her where she goes, make sure. And that other one hanging with those chinks. Go tell the Mexicans -- no sale. I'm not exchanging money for men -- those two things don't go together, regardless of what Queena thinks. She's so much a whore, that's naturally how she thinks. But that's not how I think. Tell them, there will be reprisals if they're killed. They abduct, we can too. They kill our men, we kill theirs. That's the way it's going to be.

[to COOTY.] Come on.

[Exit SLATER and COOTY.]

SCENE 11**[DJ and MAC9 in captivity.]****DJ**

Reminded me of my mother you know, a little bit. Got that same kind of look. I remember.

MAC9

Must be rough you old like that, no place to go, wander around. What can you do?

DJ

Well hey at least we give her some cigarettes, she sure enough liked that whiskey.

MAC9

Yeah that was a weird scene, man. She howling at the moon practically.

DJ

My mother an addict like that. She looked just like that. I remember. Yeah. She used to send me out to get her rock for her, and she go to the store for her 40oz., get two of them, come back after a while -- stop to see a couple boyfriends on the way. I'd be there with her crack, sitting on the couch. She come in the door, see me, get this big smile. I didn't know if it was cause of me, cause she was drunk, or she wanted that crack, or a combination. Think it was the crack mostly. She sit there smoke it up, drink her beer, send me out for another rock a little while later. She used to get real funny sometimes, look at me like I was the cops, real suspicious all of a sudden. Then it would go away, and it would be her again.

MAC9

My mother just shot heroin, or cook up those pills, you know. She never did no crack, which was kind of good, dope just make her nice and calm. But it was her damn boyfriends always beat my head in, you know.

DJ

Oh yeah.

MAC9

Or beat her up too, had to hide under the bed, me and her both, while he trash the whole apartment, happened a bunch of times.

DJ

Yeah I had that. But then you get bigger--

MAC9

Yeah then they don't come around no more.

DJ

Then it's you got to go out and get the money for her.

MAC9

Yep.

DJ

It was ok.... I ain't seen her in a while.

MAC9

Last I saw mine, she was dead. OD. I never saw my father. Saw a picture of him once. Handsome dude too, no wonder she liked him. Yeah...

DJ

You think they gonna get us out?

MAC9

I don't know.

DJ

You don't think?

MAC9

I don't know. Maybe ...yeah, I guess... why not?

DJ

That's what I say: they got to have loyalty, you know?

MAC9

Funny, never dream much before. Kept on dreaming I was back home with my mother. My mother -- man....that's crazy. I ain't dreamed like that since I was twelve years old. That's when they first took me away.

DJ

Took me away, I was ten I think, foster home. That was fucked up.

MAC9

Yeah that's what I had. Could she come to visit you?

DJ

Yeah she come every once in a while.

MAC9

Mine came once, I remember, she was so high, lady wouldn't let her in the door. They start

screaming at each other, duking it out bang bang. When I come out they' d run her off, but left this bag for me, paper bag, couple little toys inside. She must a thought I was still like six years old -- stuff like you'd give a six year old. I threw it out.

DJ

That must a been pretty messed up.

MAC9

Yeah. It was.

DJ

We're done. You know? We're done. We didn't even have nothing yet, and now this is it. Come up to make it big, and now this the way it ends.

MAC9

We should a taken a different route when we could.

DJ

No sense saying it now.

MAC9

We're done for, man, we're done for. This is it.

DJ

Been nice knowing ya.

MAC9

Think of the city out there, I can almost hear it, going on and on.

DJ

The traffic. The people out there doing things, going all kinds of places. Never stops

MAC9

No one will know who we were.

DJ

I didn't know what I even was yet, I was just finding out. No one will know we were even here.

[They effortlessly remove the ropes with which they had been tied. It is as if they rediscover themselves and the world. They stand and move to opposite points on the stage, addressing not each other, nor even the audience, but the World, Time, and Fate. Likewise, they no longer speak with the accents of the street; rather their voices are dignified and educated, and we realize that it is their souls speaking.]

MAC9

Look at this. These are my hands. You know I keep thinking that to myself. I just keep looking at them.

DJ

These are my arms, I keep thinking that. It seems funny, but I keep wondering, Who am I? What am I?

MAC9

What does it mean to have two hands, two arms, two eyes -- to be a person?

DJ

I wonder what I could have been. I keep looking at my hand in front of my face. My palm is like a map of everything I could have been, all the places I might have gone. But now an unbreachable wall separates me from all of that. That wall is everything that I have been, everything that I have done, which now can never be undone.

MAC9

I wish that I could go back in time, return and do things over. I wish that I could roll back all the days as you might imagine the clouds moving backward, like vapor boiling up and flowing backward past the edges of the buildings, back into the past.

DJ

I wish that I could go back up the streets that led me here, retracing all my steps, as though there were a different route through time that I might take.

MAC9

Think of the sky, radiant with light and luminous clouds.

DJ

The cirrus clouds so high they cast no shadow on the fields below.

MAC9

Think of the rain falling down through leaves. How wonderful to feel it on your upturned face.

DJ

Think of the stars at night, so many! And how your mind reaches out to them! Where are we? Who are we?

MAC9

The empty streets are like a game board, the pieces all moved around. But you don't see the hand that's moving them.

DJ

On the crowded streets, look at all the little pieces hurrying.

MAC9
Moon in the sky shining down on the empty land.

DJ
Sun in the sky shining down on the burning city.

MAC9
We might as well be dead already. Shout as loud as you want, no one can hear you.

DJ
This is the end of my existence in the world.

MAC9
What is there after death?

DJ
Is there anything?

MAC9
The stars pass over us,
Millions

DJ
The days the nights
Pass over us

MAC9
On a day
We rise up from sleep

DJ
On a night
We walk out into the emptiness

[They sit back down and are as before.]

[End of scene.]

SCENE 12

[A secret meeting place. LES is waiting.]

[Enter COOTY.]

COOTY

Hey.

LES

Up.

COOTY

Slater's paranoid, he's crazy.

LES

I know, I know. He won't listen, he won't do anything to improve his position. All he knows is be rigid, be stubborn.

COOTY

What about this situation, those two? You getting them out? I told him you were. I think somebody else told him too, but I'm not sure.

LES

Yeah it's coming. No problem. On my own I opened a channel. I know how to get along with people a little better than him. Just between you and me, don't tell anyone what I tell you or I ain't gonna tell you.

COOTY

Yeah ok.

LES

I got a deal, I know where they are, I know who did it and why. The Mexicans almost as messed up as we are. They pretend they're strong and unified, but it's bluff. Half of them want to get real tight with the gangs down in Mexico, the old country, they paysans, they goompas, other half want to get hooked up in the north -- these chink gangs up near Frisco. That's what this is about -- one group try to mess up the other by messing with us. Then we hit back at them and these others sneak off behind the scenes while they ain't looking 'cause we shooting at them. You see how it work? I know what to do about it. Them two ain't worth anything, but I deliver them to your doorstep pretty soon anyway.

COOTY

Dead or alive?

LES

Alive.

COOTY

What about Queena, what she been doing with the Mexicans?

LES

What do you think she been doing with them?

COOTY

She do it standing up or lying down?

LES

She do it every which way. She like one of them wheels of fortune -- you turn her anyway around, but it amount to the same thing. I got her under control, don't worry. Like I say, I'll have them two before the time is up. Tomorrow. I got to go see him now. Did you calm him down a little?

COOTY

Yeah oh yeah. Everything's cool.

LES

Good. Well we'll see, I guess. Talk to you later.

COOTY

Yeah sure.

[Exit both.]

SCENE 13 [SLATER'S secret hiding place.]

[LES enters.]

SLATER

Where have you been? I've been waiting.

LES

All right -- well, as I say, I could have prevented all of this. Fortunately I think we have it straightened out. They'll be delivered right to that party you're going to have. Got it all planned -- we'll bring them in the kitchen, and then, when you make your speech that you're gonna do, they can come out: you take credit for getting them out, and you didn't have to pay all that money.

SLATER

How is it that you're on such good terms with them, they do what you want, become real easy to deal with when you approach. You must have just the right kind of meat you hold out to them, they wagging they tail for you, lick your hand. How come?

LES

What's going on with you? You know you stay in here too much. That's one thing

SLATER

Thinking. Here. A knife – it's better than a gun in so many ways. A blade don't go as far, but it always knows where it's going, a bullet don't but a blade does.

[SLATER extends knife to DL.]

SLATER

Take it.

[LES does nothing.]

SLATER

Come on.

[LES does nothing.]

All right how about we do this.

[SLATER draws, but extends a second gun to LES.]

A duel. Like in olden days.

[LES still does nothing.]

SLATER

All right then here. Take it. It's the lesser of two evils. A man who won't take up a weapon cannot be trusted.

[LES reluctantly takes the knife.]

SLATER

Now come at me. [indicating his chest] It's right here.

LES

You're crazy, man. We got work to do out there. I do not enjoy these kinds of games. Meanwhile there are serious issues to deal with.

SLATER

You have the knife. Come at me.

LES

No.

SLATER

Come on.

LES

No.

[SLATER extends a scabbard.]

SLATER

Put it back in here. Of course, you could easily cut me at any time: my wrist is right there, exposed. And that blade is like a razor. Do I dare to trust you? Are you worthy?

[LES slides knife into scabbard.]

SLATER

Good.

I don't like the idea of paying money for men. How much did you pay for them? You and her can both get with that idea real easy. But it doesn't sit with me.

LES

I told you, if money is the problem, we have ways of dealing with that.

SLATER

Money is just paper. It's not a question of money.

LES

What's it question of?

SLATER

Credibility, honesty, leadership. Laugh if you want. I have those things. Everyone knows I do. Bo didn't, you don't, you never will. But you have money, don't you. Lots of people think that, and they can't figure out where it all could come from. It don't come from no rap stars.

LES

How do you know?

SLATER

I don't think it does. And not from no drug sales. You don't sell nothing except yourself. That's fine. We've got a lot of whores around here, we're used to that. I think it comes from somewhere else. Your fingerprints are on that knife now. The cops will need someone to blame Bo's death on. You know they're very dedicated public servants. And the death of a young Black man is an outrage that can in no way be permitted in our society, there is no place for it in our fair city. Therefore, they will press -- press -- to get to the bottom of it. They will find without fail and apprehend with swiftness the doer of this evil deed, and then --alas-- it will come to light that it was none other than another young Black male,

indeed his one-time colleague and friend Lester the Jester who must then be incarcerated in one of our fine prisons, where he will unfortunately come into close -- close --contact with the friends and colleagues of his late victim. O woe, woe to such a one, Lester, woe to such a one.

LES

You talk real good sometimes. Just like your brother. All right, look man, look, look—we're getting way out of line here. We both are. It's stress, it must be.

SLATER

Do you think so?

LES

Yeah, yeah. Look I'm solid with you, I want you to know that. We had our ups and downs, that's true -- this, this all here, I think it's stress, you know -- it can affect your mind, we know this. But we work it out. And we work together.

SLATER

Get the dope going again. Tell them we can do business if they're reasonable. There will be reprisals if they're not. You better use this connection of yours. If they think they can force us out of business, and we just dry up and blow away -- they're wrong. I'll burn down half Los Angeles if I have to -- their half. Make sure they understand. I do have the fire power. I will do it.

[LES is about to exit.]

SLATER

Oh, one thing. I want you to get rid of this Cooty. I told him to follow you, so that's what he'll be doing. I'm tired of him.

LES

Amusements are people too, you know. That's what they say.

SLATER

Amusements are people too. That's interesting. But I don't agree.

LES

By when?

SLATER

Doesn't matter. Next few weeks. make it so it blends in with other stuff. And those two girls of Queen's, get rid of both of them.

LES

All right.

SLATER

I'll be here. If Queena asks, tell her, but don't tell anybody else.

[Exit LES.]

[Exit SLATER.]

SCENE 14 [A public reception place. The men are milling about.]

[JANELLE and MARKITA enter.]

JANNELE and MARKITA [ad lib]

...hey hey hey everybody ... kisses kisses...etc

2ND G

So, looking pretty fine I see.

MARKITA

Oh thank you.

JANELLE

Ready to have a party

MARKITA

As usual.

1ST GANGER

Ok that's cool.

2ND GANGER

Remind me to have fun.

1ST GANGER

Smile, man we all unified.

2ND GANGER

I'm feeling unified.

MARKITA

When all the others gonna get here?

1ST GANGER

Guess they coming pretty soon.

JANELLE

Lighten up, you all got to just relax and have fun and just--

MARKITA

Think those two be here?

2ND GANGER

That's what we heard.

1ST GANGER

Maybe they come later.

2ND GANGER

Think they be around.

1ST GANGER

Lester strutting all around like a big man, so I guess he must a done something.

[Enter 3RD GANGER.]

2ND GANGER

Up man? What's wrong?

3rd GANGER

That DJ and MAC 9 -- the hostages --?

1ST GANGER

Yeah what about them?

3rd GANGER

They're dead.

1ST GANGER

Dead?!

3RD GANGER

Yes. They were just left here. Before the place was opened. the owner said he found them in the back. You got to come on. And there might some people still around -- watch out --

[The 3 draw their guns.]

[Enter SLATER, with COOTY.]

SLATER

What going on? What's wrong? What do you have your guns out for? Put them away.

3RD GANGER

Over here.

[Discovery of the dead bodies of DJ and MAC9, under sheets.]

3RD GANGER

Mexicans dumped them off. I don't want to say what they did to them. Don't look. You don't want to see.

[Everyone is still.]

[QUEENA exits suddenly. Everyone see this.]

[SLATER breaks the silence.]

SLATER

You want more dead Black men like those two? You want more of that? Well I'm not going to have it. Maybe I was wrong before. Maybe I should have ransomed them. It was a judgment call I made. Now let it be a judgment on me -- that's fine. It was a price we had to pay. And in the long run, you'll see that it was worth it. Because we cannot show weakness. If you want more dead Black men, just like these two here, then start showing weakness. We have to have strength and loyalty. I'm going to find who sold these two out. I'm going to find that person. That traitor. But what were they doing over there with the Mexicans anyway? And we've got others around here hanging with the Vietnamese, we know that. So the rule is now, we keep to ourselves. Make sure. Unity. With discipline and loyalty and keeping our eyes open, and using our minds, we'll come through all of this. Whatever sacrifices must be made, you'll see that it will be worth it.

[Exit SLATER and COOTY.]

1ST GANGER
Pretty hard man.

2ND GANGER
Guess so.

3RD GANGER
Cold, cold type of guy.

LES
What you expect him to say?

3RD GANGER
I don't know, but these guys are dead. They lying there dead.

2ND GANGER
Ought to have some kind of respect. I'm not saying got to have a sermon--

1ST GANGER
He gave us that anyhow.

[MARKITA sits on the floor, crying.]

LES
Oh yeah, you crying now, but you helped to set this up –

MARKITA
...no...

LES
Yeah, going where you shouldn't go. Just like that other one --
[gestures indicating QUEENA]

JANELLE **[Stepping between them.]**
Leave her alone! Leave her the hell alone!

LES **[to the gangers]**
Come on let's get out of here. Maybe they be doing a drive by on us next, this just the calling card.

2ND GANGER
Yeah let's go.

1ST GANGER
Come on.

JANELLE

No. No, we ain't going with you.

3RD GANGER

Come on.

JANELLE

No no. No get away.

3RD GANGER

All right fine, get shot.

[LES and the 3 GANGERS exit.]

MARKITA

You think she did it out of spite to him?

JANELLE

I don't know. Who knows?

MARKITA

Those two boys are gone. They'll never come back, we'll never see them again.

JANELLE

Let's just go, Markita. we can't think about all that. It happens so much -- come on we better go, like he says.

[Exit JANELLE and MARKITA.]

SCENE 15 [At LES'S place. It is like SLATER'S.]

QUEENA

Thank you for calling me up and being so supportive, and for inviting me here. I never knew exactly where you lived, you were always so secretive.

LES

Yeah, no problem. Slater set me up with this place a while back. Said it would be more safe, just like the place that he's got -- thinks being up high makes it harder to shoot in. I guess that's true. I think it was so he could know where I was at all times and assassinate me easier. He's an interesting guy, little naïve maybe.

QUEENA

He does have some... tendencies. Well, that was quite an upsetting scene. I just couldn't stand to see – the whole thing, it was just too much.

LES

I suppose it was. He was too impulsive. Out of control. That's why it happened. I was trying to tell him.

QUEENA

So was I. Too much into the whole cave man thing.

LES

I've always said he's got a real blind spot there.

QUEENA

Fortunately not all men are like that – you're not like that.

LES

Limits you too much I always think.

QUEENA

I never could get it through his head that he had to deal with people in more civilized ways.

LES

Yeah, that whole challenge match thing –

QUEENA

Yes, yes -- it should never have happened.

LES

No.

QUEENA

I was trying to stop it. I thought it was a kind of an embarrassment for us, really.

LES

Yes, yes. So did I.

QUEENA

He wouldn't listen.

LES

No, he wouldn't listen to me either.

QUEENA

I remember I asked you this once before about him, if you thought he was really good for us anymore. You didn't want to hear about it then.

LES

Yeah I'm sorry for going off on you like that.

QUEENA

Oh that's all right. I knew you were just trying to keep me in line, out of your broader experience. Which I do respect, I always have.

LES

Yes and I know you have your own.

QUEENA

Ah yes --

LES

But yeah, I know what you mean, what you were referring to. I guess we'll have to think about it some more. But in the meantime, I think we both need to relax a little.

QUEENA

Oh well that's certainly true.

LES

Maybe you'd like to look out from my balcony. Real nice out there this time of night. Nice view. We could see the lights of the town.

QUEENA

Well yes. Sure.

[Exit both.]

SCENE 16 **[In hiding at their apartment. As though barricaded.]**

[MARKITA by herself, preparing to inject heroin. Enter JANELLE.]

MARKITA

Where you been? Anybody follow you?

JANELLE

What you doing?

MARKITA

What's it took like I'm doing? Anybody follow you?

JANELLE

Don't think so. I think we should hang out here for a while, stay away from everything.

MARKITA

I'm not used to this anymore... did you get those pills?

JANELLE

Yeah Queena knows this guy from Florida got all the pills you want. It ain't as good, but better than nothing. Where you get this?

MARKITA

Les. Now I got to fool with this here like I say... Lord Lord Lord, give me that vein again sweet Jeezus, trouble you put me up to, ain't used no needle in so long forgot how to do it.

JANELLE **[going to her]**

Here, let me see what's happening.

MARKITA

Used to have that good high grade stuff, didn't have to fool with this, could just smoke it...
... shoot I hate this...

[MARKITA suddenly becomes very still.]

JANELLE

Ok?

[Silence.]

MARKITA

Yeah ok, oh... ohhh....

[MARKITA sinks down, seemingly unconscious. For a moment she seems dead.]

JANELLE

Markita...?! Hey oh baby oh baby baby baby, come on.... Marktia.... Markita don't die on me you, damn you damn you, stupid...Markita!

MARKITA [coming around, high as could be]

Ooo...whooooo....oooooooo.... I'm fine...ok? I'm fine.... Oh yeah....

JANELLE

Oh damn you. You had me so scared for a minute there...

MARKITA

Good Lord Lord Lord.... Well it's not so bad, you know. When you do it this way. Oh shoot, relax, Janey Jane...what's up with you?

JANELLE

Well I thought you were dead for a minute there. Damn you. [J swats her.]

MARKITA

Well ain't you even seen a dope fiend take a shot before? [laughs] Are you ok?

JANELLE

Yes.

[JANELLE begins to weep, though she tries to stifle it.]

Yes. I'm all right.

MARKITA [embracing her]

What's wrong, what's wrong, what's wrong?

JANELLE

Nothing. How are we ever going to get out of here? How I wish we never came here Markita, how I wish we never came here. I guess it's just my nerves... all this stuff these days. I just had this image for a second.

MARKITA [She is concerned, but she is definitely high.]

What image Jaynee?

JANELLE

If you actually died and I had to be here by myself... damn you, you don't know how to do that stuff no more, don't fool with it.

MARKITA

Oh baby I'm sorry. I'm all right really, I'm all all all right, don't worry.

JANELLE [embracing her fondly]

Yeah I can see that now. You're high as a kite up in the branches, I can see that. You like a dandelion puff floating across the green fields. Ain't that right?

MARKITA

You are so silly, Janey. Hey you know just then I got to tell you, it was so beautiful you know. Sometimes I get high I see these things... Kind of like, walk through a door... into a special place... and just then...I was seeing --

JANELLE

What?

MARKITA

I don't know...I don't know... Oh Janey lighten up....

JANELLE

You're so high, you don't know one thing from another. You going to still see him?

MARKITA

I know I shouldn't do it. Slater find out – he's so suspicious already, he's crazy. Sometimes I think he'll kill me.

JANELLE

Kill both of us.

MARKITA

But maybe I will anyway. I love him too much.

JANELLE

Yeah you always did. You gave me quite a scare then, you know, you stupid...

[JANELLE hugs her fiercely.]

MARKITA

I saw this picture once these little Mexican girls, this one she was so pretty, about ten, you know. She was playing 'bride', had this pretty white dress on, standing by the front yard fence, and there was a tree in the yard and a sunset behind it, and she was just standing there in her little white wedding dress all frilly and fancy, looking so serious. So serious. I can still remember that picture. Don't know where I saw it, some old book.

JANELLE

They got to let their girls do what they want at least sometimes. He don't know everything and he don't have to neither. So we got to stay here instead. That's cool, make some money, have some fun. Come on get up.

MARKITA

Ok just a minute. You know, that stuff ain't too bad, you shoot it like that. Forgot about how that was. DAMN whoooo. How do I look ?

JANELLE

You'll knock 'em dead. Come on, bars going to close.

MARKITA

All right.

[Exit both.]

SCENE 17**GRIOT**

And the situation was terminal
In the city of Los Angeles

CHOR

Under the desert sun
In the dark time of the world

Where there is nothing!

GRIOT

When is strength weakness? --
A man stumbling forward
As though carrying a great load
Goes with heavy labor
On a narrow road

When are the clever foolish? --
So many turning aside
Tracing paths in darkness,
O what will betide?

CHOR

What good can come
When brother fights with brother
What good can come
The hot sun burning down

What evil lives
In the dark time of the world

There were two gangs in Los Angeles

GRIOT

Hot sun of the desert burning down
Night was coming and millions of stars --
Slowly slowly, quickly quickly --
Over the entire town.

[Exit G.] [Exit CHOR.]

End of play

